

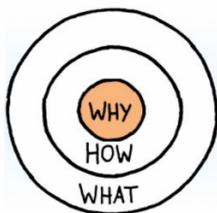
Creating an online retail destination for your business.

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Arguably, the most important aspect of your business in today's market is your digital presence. But for many small businesses the whole concept can be overwhelming and confusing. What features should appear on the website? What social media platforms should we run? How often should we post? Who will be responsible for the content and the maintenance of the website? How do we raise our online profile?

So, where do we begin?

When I started my business one of the most important factors that influenced everything I did was listening to the Simon Sinek talk on the Golden Circle



We all know WHAT we do - the products and/or services we sell

We are all aware of HOW we do it - why those products/services are better or stand out from the competition

But the most important thing is WHY we do what we do. What is our purpose, our vision, our belief and motivation

Once you can identify this real “WHY” of your business, then how you market your business, how you form strategies, how you operate your business in general will be so much easier.

When you started your business (I hope) you would have completed a business plan - creating an online retail destination requires exactly the same process - you need a plan - a digital strategy.

So, with your “ WHY” defined - your digital strategy should outline your business' goals and set measurable objectives for the desired outcomes. It is a hugely important document for your business but don't assume you'll get it right on the first try.

The goal here is branding and attracting customers. Displaying your business' personality through your digital presence is one of the best ways to connect with your target audience. Your social media channels are just expanded opportunities for your brand's voice.

What areas should your digital strategy encompass?

Without question, the most important part of your strategy is:-

1. A responsive and intelligent website

**80% of customer will find you via a search on the mobile phone
(90% will make a judgement about your business based on that website)**

Your website should be the centre of your business' online presence.

It enables your customer to learn about your services, your work, the products you wish to sell, your team and your brand's message.

People want to carry out research online first, before leaving the comfort of their couch. Over 80% of consumers will research product information before they make a purchase online or in store.

Your website is your most important marketing asset - it is a salesperson, a brand ambassador and can genuinely connect with potential customers.

Judgements on a company's credibility are nearly always based on the company's website (or lack of one!).

It needs to offer engaging content, a mobile-responsive layout, and be easy to navigate



Following your website, then the plan must include some or all of the following: -

2. A business Facebook page

3. An Instagram business account

4. A Pinterest business account (a visual search engine that can be a gold mine for your business) *Link your Instagram with your Pinterest account with IFTTT.com*

5. A Twitter business account

6. A LinkedIn Company page (the fastest growing and yet most underrated of all the platforms)

7. An EDM (mail campaign)

And maybe...

7. A Snapchat account

8. A You Tube Channel

Do your research on the statistics of each platform - which ones do your customers engage most with? (google statistics is a great place to start) Which ones work within your customer's demographic?

(great resources you may find useful for statistics and for tips are sproutsocial.com and hootsuite.com)

Once you have decided which of these networks/platforms to focus on, you need to create a profile for each platform (or improve your existing profile) so they align with your strategic plan. It is a good idea to create a mission statement or value proposition for each platform.

The exact scope of your digital strategy will vary depending on your business and what you do. In each area, your digital strategy should look at the benefits each of these technologies have for your business. It is better to use fewer channels well, than to stretch yourself thin trying to maintain a presence on every network. You have to decide which networks/platforms to focus on - which will align best with your target audience and with your strategic plan. Make sure you format content specifically for each platform - good high-res images for Instagram, longer posts for LinkedIn, snappy announcements for Twitter.

Now, give your digital strategy structure

1. Set actionable and measurable goals

Each of your goals should be specific, relevant, and measurable

Give yourself time limits for goals to be achieved ie. We would like to increase our reach on Facebook by 50% by the end of December.

2. Research your audience

It is so important that you know your audience, your ideal customer.

How old are they, what gender are they, where do they work?

Who is connecting with you on social media?

What networks does your target audience use?

How does your social media presence compare to that of your competitors?

Your goal is to achieve FANS not just followers.

It may be helpful to create an identity for your customer - give them a name, an occupation, define the family situation, where they shop etc.

3. Establish the most important metrics

Awareness - Your brand awareness and your post reach

Engagement - how many likes you get/shares - regrams, repins, shares, etc

Conversion - the effectiveness of your social engagement (click to subscribe to a newsletter, register for an in-store education session or any call to action.)

Consumer review, assessment, comment or interview related to your brand.

It is important not to get caught up in the 'vanity metrics' of getting more followers. You can get followers, but what you want is customers - followers don't pay the bills. When you know who you are engaging with you will know what content to create, and what channels are best to promote.

4. Analyse your competition

Understand who the competition is and what they are doing well (and not so well) This analysis will help you spot opportunities (For instance, are they strong on Facebook but have put little effort into instagram - you may wish to focus on the platforms where your audience is under-served, rather than trying to win fans away from a dominant player)

Who does your competition follow?

Who is following them?

How often do they post?

5. Create and curate engaging content

You need to think like a **publisher** not an advertiser

Great content isn't great until it is consumed and shared

You don't need to appeal to everyone. Focus on content that appeals and connects to your audience. By focusing on your target audience you can expand your engagement and build a dedicated community.

Keep it authentic and original - Google will reward high quality sites contain original content.

Master each platform and gain feedback - what do they want? Answer their questions and like their comments. Becoming a brand requires depth and substance.

You need to become a practitioner of all the platforms - think about this before you delegate the task to someone else. The more you know, the more educated you are on each platform the better the result you will gain. If you are not the practitioner then you are vulnerable.

You need to build trust - which involves time and consistency - post regularly, post at the same frequency and post at the same time - this posting schedule will help build the relationship.

What strategically connects both your website and your social media channels is content.

Generating compelling content that people want to like, share and engage in is the way to achieving brand awareness.

You need to engage regularly with your customers and update your site and social media sites with new content on a regular basis.

Even though 80% of people will probably read your headlines - it is important to note that only 10% of people will read the text - it is best to keep it short, succinct and guide your customers with carefully crafted words. Remember you are PUBLISHING not advertising!

Story-telling is integral - your goal is to take the customers on a brand journey. It may be that you are more likely to be involved in the image-driven socials - if this is the case then it is important to post images that are high-res, good quality and easy to load.

6. Go above and beyond with service

Provide exceptional consumer support.

Almost all consumers use social media in some way to communicate with a brand. You will also find most of your consumers prefer to communicate through the use of social media rather than traditional channels like phone or email

Don't neglect your customers. Every direct support question should be answered.

Don't delete (or hide) comments or posts (unless they are spam or violating guidelines)

Don't be defensive.

Speed of response is critical

If your sole reason for being on social media is leverage or growth, you'll never succeed.

People can sense when you only see them as a conversion. Focus on connecting with your tribe and communicating your business' true message.

As you start to implement your plan and track your results you will find that some strategies work and others will not.

Does your brand /business have a consistent look? (logo/fonts/colours) are your posts immediately identifiable as your business?

Always ask the question is it relevant to your audience.

Remember the customer - not the brand- wields the most power over a brand's image on social media.

Separate yourself from your competition by delivering more value. This is the key to positioning yourself as an authority, which in turn helps you to attract genuine customers and grow your business and brand.