

Social media: If you cook it, will they come?

By Catherine Milward-Bridges

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Are your social media efforts leaving your bottom line bottomless? Has your business now put social media on autopilot, as a result?

Whether you're an expert or a novice, sticking to the basics when using social media will save you a lot of time and gain you considerable traction, over time. Adopting a simple approach is the best way to go if you're hoping for a sustained relationship with social media.



Let's explore six steps that will help you optimise social media seamlessly.

1. Have a plan/goal

For starters, these are some guiding questions to ask yourself regularly - experts and novices alike:

- Why do I want to use social media in my business?
- What am I hoping to gain from using social media?
- Do I have something of value to say on social media?
- Who do I hope to say it to?
- Do I have the capacity to maintain consistency, once I start?

With these questions answered satisfactorily, the next step is to draft a plan (if you don't yet have one) to map where you want to go with social media. This can be tweaked as you go; the important thing is to have a clear framework to work from.

Note: Make sure your plan/goal is realistic and measurable, in line with your answers to the questions above.

2. Look outward

Social media is all about adding value to others' lives, rather than grabbing for yourself. If you master this - authentically - you're most likely to have more and more people turn to you for guidance. However, remember it's a gradual process.

Think about how you can use social media simply, to achieve the goals you've set. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, YouTube and others have made it really easy to engage with your target audience, and market your business.

Note: Once you start, you have to be consistent, to gain the desired traction and to elicit support. Decide on a realistic frequency, and stick to it. Posting content once a month is neither here nor there.

3. WIIFT

What's in it for them?

Your target audience needs to be able to find real value in what you have to say - this could be sharing useful tips, asking and answering evocative questions, sharing personal experiences that will resonate, etc.

In order for your content to resonate with your audience, you need to:

- know who you're targeting
- ask your audience what they'd like to read about - this is an important step that's often overlooked
- take note of trends in their posts, and tweak your approach accordingly
- adopt a qualitative stance when creating content
- evaluate your results, so that you know how/when to tweak your strategy.

Note: Ask yourself, "Why would my audience want to click on/share what I'm about to post?"

4. Watch the traffic

Knowing WHERE your audience 'lives' on social media is pivotal in guiding your focus areas. Use Google Analytics, as a no-fuss way to gain insight into this very important group of people. You can make your analysis as basic or detailed as you wish.

After about 30 days, you may compare the results and you'll know which social networks drive most of your website traffic; and where you should focus your efforts.

Note: You need to be where your customers are.

5. Don't just cook it

Content is king! Make sure your content strategy is a good one.

The most impressive Facebook cover photo, or Twitter profile picture is reduced to nil in the absence of engaging content.

Find a thread between your:

- content development
- social media audience demographics
- business goals.

Note: read your content as if you were a recipient, and be as objective as you can; that said, you're never going to be able to please everyone.

6. Take note of trends

While you don't want to change course every time the wind changes direction, social media trends are definitely worth taking note of. You can then decide if/how you should tweak your approach, to stay relevant.

If your audience resides mostly on Facebook, then this is an example of a trend you don't want to disregard:

KISSmetrics has found that FB posts with photos garner:

- 53% more likes
- 104% more comments
- 84% more click-throughs than text-based posts

To sum it all up:

- have a plan
- get to know your audience's needs
- make it all about them, not you

- know who visits your site
- set the content quality-bar high
- note the trends

When working from a well-established foundation, you'll find yourself spending less time 'cooking' on social media, and more time optimising your output.

Here's to 'cooking it, and having them come'!

ABOUT CATHERINE MILWARD-BRIDGES

Catherine Milward-Bridges is a passionate communication specialist and founder of simplyput.co.za. Catherine guides her clients in taking their engagement efforts from good to great; and helps them optimise social media with strategic know-how.

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