

# Social Media for Sales Professionals:

## How to Make Tomorrow Better than Today!

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## Social Media for Sales Professionals: How to Make Tomorrow Better than Today!

*"Don't stop, thinking about tomorrow,  
Don't stop, it'll soon be here,  
It'll be, better than before,  
Yesterdays gone, yesterdays gone." Fleetwood Mac*

It's never been a better day to prepare for tomorrow. Your customers and plenty of opportunities are waiting for you. By leveraging social networking to attract, engage and build authentic relationships with prospects and customers, your tomorrows will be way better than before. This white paper addresses how social media can help you sell more, today and tomorrow, and step-by-step directions to get started right now.

### Why is Social Networking So Important?

**Your customers are waiting.** Yes, *your* customers. They are already online and are looking for you. And if you think I'm wrong, consider this statistic from the Education and Research Institute for Applied Social Media: As of January 2009 there were over 34,000 farmers and users of John Deere equipment in online groups. But if you're selling to farmers, you may think they want to sit with you in a neighborly way. Not so much. They want to educate themselves before their conversation with you (or maybe instead of their conversation with you). Your customers are reading blog posts and review sites, they're tweeting on Twitter, networking on LinkedIn, and learning from wikis, podcasts, YouTube and SlideShare. You need to be where they are.

### Your customers are waiting and they want the truth.

Imagine this: You see an advertisement for Widget A and it looks like the best thing since the invention of the latte. You mention it to your neighbor via email, and she says, "Run. Don't walk. I bought one for Ethan last week and it's broken already. Thanks for reminding me to return it."

Third party testimonials — what others say — have always carried more weight than what a company spokesperson might say (no matter how well crafted their spokespersons). But today, customers don't need to depend on neighbors (which is good because they may not know them) for an *authentic* viewpoint. Instead, they can get the truth from a multitude of social networks, which you can manage.

So, why is social networking so important? It makes buying — whether it's a transactional sale or a more complex one — easier, smarter and safer for the buyer. And you can bury your head in the sand, or manage your sales success and improve your customer's experience by tuning in to the networks they use.

## 9 Ways Social Media Helps You Succeed

**1. It warms the cold call.** You can generate leads and start meaningful relationships by answering questions people pose on Twitter, by posting useful information on your blog, on others' blogs, and on association and community sites. When you follow-up, you're calling as an expert solution provider not a self-focused sales person. You can create a huge network of potential leads, and be introduced to an even larger one. Instead of wishing for the "old days" when you could "just pick up the phone," social networking sites provide new and improved tools to extend your reach further, faster. (This is not to say the phone isn't useful. The more high tech we use, the more high touch we need. Social media, however, makes connecting with prospects easier, more fun and more satisfying than ever.)

**2. You can blow your own horn without bragging.** Sites like LinkedIn ask you to list your credentials. How cool is that! Your blog posts can show the world your expertise. You can help create a community and groupies who eagerly buy (and even sell for you!) your services and products, through a FaceBook Fan page or a Forum. You can educate your customer base (and potential customers) and differentiate yourself from the competition by addressing customer "pain" and offering thoughtful (blog) or quick (Twitter) solutions. With social media, your customers can easily find you (inbound selling — how nice!). And when you're reaching out to them, you can link them with answers beyond corporate hype. Instead of selling, social media offers a social platform that invites them to buy. Social networking makes everyone breathe easier, feel more confident, trust more.

**3. You can compare, contrast and benchmark what your competitors are doing.** Not only can you mine all sorts of competitive data by reading their posts, viewing their reviews, and watching their SlideShare shows, but you can learn from them, too. One of my favorite aspects of Twitter is how much I learn from others' "tweets." Just today, competitors (and others I follow) posted over 30 links for new takes on presentation success. For a presenter, that's a treasure trove of information and I never would have found it on my own. I also follow my clients, their competition and other opinion leaders, and get "inside" tips from three competing companies — all of whom are my clients!

**4. You can manage your reputation.** We've always known that happy customers talk less about their happiness than those who are not. But both groups talk, and now they talk on-line. The great news is that you see what they're saying and you get to manage what they say. You can't delete it, but you get to do something better: Show you care and make it right.

Social media helps you to be social — in good times and bad. Social media also gives you the analytics you need to improve what you do. You can learn, engage and prosper by handling objections truthfully, carefully and respectfully. (And your fans will come to your defense if you make it easy for them to do so.)

**5. You can help your customers buy.** You can shorten the sales cycle by providing all the information your customers need to buy from you. You can load videos, share PowerPoint presentations and educate through wikis and other tools. (By the way, the tools will

continue to morph. What is hot today may not be hot tomorrow; what matters is that you're part of the conversation!) With social media, your customers can educate themselves — they can do their due diligence — and can more easily sell your differences and strengths to their stakeholders. You get to manage and add information to the pool of knowledge so that your customers can make the best business decisions — the ones that favor you.

**6. You can build community.** From blog responses to Second City, you can connect your customers so, synergistically, they all profit and, of course, so do you. You can help others feel safe and smart (an important trend in buying during this rough economy) by connecting them with other happy buyers.

**7. You can hang out where your customers are.** Social media gives you a coveted barstool at the hippest bar in town. Remember though, that whenever one is being social, it's easy to become obnoxious. Social networking is about connection and communication — not selling. Take good virtual care of them by truly caring about them. Provide tools to help them achieve their goals. Contribute ideas to help them foster their success. Give directions that help them get to where they want to go. Drive them home.

**8. You can mix business with pleasure.** I resisted Twitter and other social media because I was turned off by the idea of reading drivel. Use social media strategically to offer value, content, education. When you're using social media for business, remember business netiquette. I've unfollowed people on Twitter (this, fortunately, is easy to do and they don't know it which makes it political too!) who use the medium to talk about what they had for breakfast, lunch and dinner — and what they thought about having too. I've stopped reading blogs of folks who shamelessly promote themselves. Used right, however, social media enables a nice mix of conversation similar to a meaningful conversation at a networking meeting. Don't dwell on yourself. Deliver meaningful, fun, interesting content. Content is king and queen.

**9. You control your success with social media.** Social media's potential depends on your ability to creatively coordinate your message. The more interesting you are and the more you contribute important information to the pool of knowledge, the more others "talk." And word of mouth — yesterday and today — is the smartest, easiest and cheapest way to win more business.

## **Get started. Now!**

So much to do and so little time! Here are my recommendations for getting started:

- **Get permission.** Unless you are your own boss, check your social media policies. If you don't have any (some companies still don't even have email guidelines!), start the conversation. Today. Now. Be brave and be bold. (You definitely don't want to be the last in line for this. As your competitors drop out of the race, be there to fill the void.)

If you have a social media policy and it sounds like it was written in another time (so 2008!), search the web for case studies and updated policies. A safe policy is smart; a restrictive policy may not be.

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- **Start a blog.** Use your company's intranet, hire a consultant, or use a free blogging platform like WordPress. Write conversationally about matters that matter to your customers. Be real. Write about everyday stuff in a compelling manner. (One of the best examples of a great blog that builds and maintains community is the blog Mr. Marriott writes, called [Marriott on the Move](#). And he does write it, I'm told.)

Headlines are important and they'll either persuade people to read and engage, or not. Study how you can use headlines to influence people. (Email me at [Sue@SpeakerSue.com](mailto:Sue@SpeakerSue.com) and I'll send you some killer tools to create compelling headlines.)

- **Read other blogs and respond to other industry leaders' posts.** Get visible. Always include your contact information. Offer to be a guest blogger to expand your network of followers. Join the conversation and contribute to others success. You don't have to give it all away, but remember to give value and a link back to your website.
- **Hot Link/Hyperlink.** Use as many appropriate hot links in your blog posts as possible. Give credit where credit is due. It comes back.
- **Open a free Twitter account.** Start following others in your industry. Retweet information that is valuable to your customers' success. Provide comments, content or quotes that others will find interesting. Try to avoid using all 140 twitter characters so others can easily retweet your message. (Twitter allows messages of up to 140 characters, including spaces and punctuation.) Start by tweeting two to three messages a day at different times.
- **Open a LinkedIn account.** Complete your profile — photo and all. Join industry and interest groups within LinkedIn and post your comments. Look for people you'd like to meet and extend invitations to them. When you invite others to link to you, write a personal email rather than using the generic greeting LinkedIn provides. Remember why you're doing this — to be social and network! When someone invites you to connect, send them a note back.
- **Open a Facebook business account.** Remember to use a professional photo and not that one you took at that party with Michael Phelps...
- **Connect Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook so that when you post a message on Twitter, it also posts on your other social media.** (I admit I used a computer consultant to do this. It was painless and done in moments. (Try: [Patrick@MachineMethods.com](mailto:Patrick@MachineMethods.com). He can walk you through anything, is reasonably priced and will have additional ideas for you that will blow you away! Tell him, SpeakerSue sent me.)
- **Capture great information from others and email it to customers and clients with a brief note:** *Thought of you when I read this. Hope you find it useful.* Then, provide the hot link.

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- **Re-build relationships by inviting lost friends and customers to become your Facebook, Plaxo or LinkedIn friend.** Customize the note you send and stay in touch to keep the relationship vital. If appropriate, view their contacts and ask for introductions.
- **Add your blog link and Twitter address to your signature line.** Make it easy for customers to find you.
- **Keep posting, tweeting and trolling.** Keep your name and company out there.

Building and sustaining relationships has always been the key to success. Social media isn't our daddy's communication tool. It's better. It's a new way of conducting business that dad and mom could only dream about. Don't wait for tomorrow. Use social media to grow your influence, business and profitability today.

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