



# FACEBOOK MARKETING

Ease of use has made Facebook the simplest way to engage in social media marketing, but like many other tools, it can fall prey to the same issues that dog most small business marketing efforts.

BY JOE SHOONER

**W**hen future generations look back on our times, they may call our current decade the “Facebook Era.” There are more than 700 million Facebook users, and the number keeps growing. The average user spends more than 15 hours a month on Facebook, so it’s no surprise that businesses are scrambling for a way to make use of this marketing channel.

Marketing is a process of communicating a specific message to a targeted group, and with any marketing effort you need to understand the scope of your audience. The United States has approximately 347 million residents; at press time, 168 million are registered Facebook users. This works out to an astounding 48% penetration rate! Admittedly, a large portion of these users are too young to buy your services, but Facebook reports that 35% of U.S. users are in the key 35- to 65-year-old age range, so there are plenty of

viable prospects to go around.

Additionally, the next generation of consumers is deeply entrenched in the digital world. Forward-thinking companies are wise to plan ahead for a time when those 15- to 25-year-olds are starting families and buying houses.

Many Green Industry companies have turned to Facebook as a marketing venue, and across all industries its ease of use has made Facebook the simplest way to engage in social media marketing. With that said, Facebook marketing falls prey to the same issues that dog most small business marketing efforts — namely, that operational concerns take priority over marketing efforts, and any marketing project without a hard deadline gets pushed to the back burner.

The time when you can get the most mileage out of marketing channels like Facebook is in the spring, when your prospects are most interested in your services. However, without a plan in place, you likely won’t make the time to properly exploit this venue. The solution: Create a simple plan this fall that you can — and will — stick with in 2012. If you make a plan and stick with it, new ideas will come to you throughout the process, and your Facebook presence will grow organically. The three criteria I suggest you consider when marketing with Facebook, or with any social media platform, are tone, content and frequency.

## tone

Deciding on the tone you want to take is incredibly important when embarking on a Facebook marketing effort. Remember that people do not check their Facebook pages because they want to be sold to; they log on to socialize. If the tone of your Facebook presence runs counter to the overriding social aspect of the platform, you’re going to have difficulty engaging anyone — and you’ll run the risk of turning people off altogether.

**My suggestion:** Pretend you’ve been invited to a cocktail party with a lot of prospects in attendance. How would you act? You wouldn’t hang up a billboard and start shouting a sales pitch through a bullhorn; it’s simply the wrong tone to strike for the venue. When figuring out your tone, try to picture how you would deal with your audience in person. In my personal experience, whenever I read a company posting on Facebook, I still assume it’s a person. Talk like you normally do, because that’s what people want.

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### CONTENT

Choosing content for a Facebook presence is a stumbling block for many businesses, and depending on the services you offer, it can be tough to figure out what you want to say. The simplest advice is this: Pretend a friend asks you what's happening with your business. What do you say? Do you talk about the major construction project you just finished? Do you talk about the community service in which your staff is engaged? Or, maybe you talk about the terrible weather and how that's wreaking havoc on your properties. These are prime subjects to cover on Facebook.

If you have a landscape construction division, here's an easy solution for populating your Facebook page. For every project, take "before" and "after" project photos. Then, create a new photo album for each project, caption the photos, and tag the client so that the client's friends can easily see the work you've just completed. Facebook gives you a simple way to consistently feed images of your work to friends of your clients. This approach also works if you're a residential landscape maintenance company that upsells construction work. Posting photos of landscape

enhancements that you've done for your regular maintenance clients is a great way to foster interest in additional projects.

Choosing content is more of a challenge if you only do lawn care or commercial landscaping. After all, you're hired so that your clients don't have to spend as much energy thinking about the services you provide.

For lawn care, you have the option to report regularly on weather conditions; the presence of weeds, insects and disease; and beneficial cultural practices. It doesn't take much effort to plan a weekly post about these items, but it's a good idea to have an actual friend on board who can give you honest feedback about whether you're overloading your page with technical details.

If you have a commercial landscaping company, you can make more headway by talking about who you are as a company. Think of Facebook as a way to promote your company culture, showcase your employees' achievements, publicize your charitable work, and pass on any other news that reflects well on your company as a whole.

**My suggestion:** This fall, develop a list of possible topics to cover. Think through the variations

Social networking now means much more than finding old high school chums.

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in your services throughout the year, and make a list of what you would talk to your clients about each month if you met with them in person. Take stock of completed projects and newsworthy stories from your staff, and compile any available photos now.

### FREQUENCY

The key to marketing with Facebook, as with any marketing venue, is consistency. So, don't do it if you can't stick to it. In a recent issue of USA Today, Emily White, Facebook's "director of local," suggests that businesses that want to succeed with Facebook should post three times per week. This may be more than you can handle, but even if you aren't highly active with your Facebook page, pick a schedule and keep at it (with the understanding that you probably won't get instant results). Managing your expectations ahead of time is important to maintaining consistent activity.

**My suggestion:** Put it on the calendar, either yours or that of someone in your organization

whom you can depend on to actually follow through. The easiest way to put it all together is to create a spreadsheet this fall that will serve as your master schedule and editorial calendar for 2012. Designate a cell for each date you want to post, and fill in as many topics as possible now. Assume that you will have to come up with some topics as you move through next season, but give yourself a leg up by plotting out as many ideas as you can this fall.

Facebook marketing, like most marketing, is not terribly complicated — nor does it require any advanced technical know-how. If you want to engage in the vast and growing community of potential clients on Facebook, create a simple, manageable plan this fall, then commit to following through with it in 2012. **LM**

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