



## BEST PRACTICES

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# Understanding social media

**C**ompanies are stretched thin, and everyone is looking for the one new tool that will bring them the greatest value. Unfortunately, there isn't only one. But if there were, it would be a commitment to shift your business communications strategy to social sites.

In 2011, when I decided to pursue a social media strategy, many people said, "Ask Scott." Scott Harris runs Mustang Marketing and is a go-to expert for social media and branding strategies.

Scott not only told me what to do, he also helped me understand why it would work. In six months, my social media initiative was up and running. Within a year, taking the online leap delivered on its promise: My business has grown faster than ever and many new clients said they found me through LinkedIn or Facebook. Others said they knew of me but social media reminded them to connect with me. Think about what it could do for your landscape business.

Looking to get started? Here are some basics, courtesy of Scott, guaranteed to give you a much better understanding of the three biggest sites for the landscape industry:

**FACEBOOK** — This social media giant gives you direct access to your audience—and gives your audience direct access to you.

**Quick steps to success:**

- › Set up a business page (Don't just put up your company name—flesh out the page with company history, details and pictures).
- › Post two to four updates per week.
- › Monitor all comments, likes and posts and respond as necessary (particularly to critical or negative posts).
- › Review weekly Facebook analytics (sent to you via email with statistics, such as the number of new fans and page visits versus the previous week).

**LINKEDIN** — It's the world's largest professional network and a potential lead generator.

**Quick steps to success:**

- › Set up a company page (Again, take the time to fully develop your company's profile and state its accomplishments.).
- › Reach out and invite connections into your network (people who will see your company page and can offer recommendations).
- › Ask your employees to follow your page and place a Follow button on your website or blog.
- › Make recommendations (the easiest way to get recommendations is to give them—these work as testimonials, offering positive reviews for both the company and its professionals).
- › Join and participate in relevant industry groups. There are hundreds of them.
- › Review profile metrics (how many have viewed your profile in the last 90 days, etc.—and make sure these numbers are going up).

**BLOG** — The best medium to demonstrate your leadership, subject matter expertise, experience and connection to your field.

**Quick steps to success:**

- › Establish a blog (make sure it's linked to your website and social media pages).
- › Have a strategy and editorial plan for high-value content. Balance original content with material from other sources. Search for relevant blogs to read, post, share, comment on, etc., to help build connections back to your own blog. Cross-promote on other social channels.
- › Review all comments and shares to your blog posts.

These social media avenues reach your audience where they live, work and play, allowing you to create and maintain unprecedented authenticity, immediacy, participation, connectedness and accountability with your audience. But it's not enough to just set up a page and wait for your audience to do the rest. Engage them, reply to their comments, keep them interested—and be sure to do so in a way that's relevant.