



How to Hire Out Your Social Media Tasks to an Expert



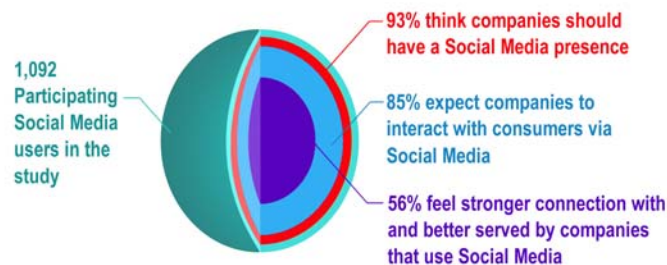


Why You Would Consider Hiring Out your Social Media Tasks

Trends Driving Social Media Marketing Today

According to census projections, Generation Y will soon outnumber baby boomers. Their familiarity with communications, media, and digital technologies is one reason for the push towards social media. However, there are other factors at play as well: a sluggish economy, higher print and postal costs, and a general lowering of consumer response to television, newspaper and other mass media platforms. This has resulted in a situation for the rapid expansion and adoption of social media.

A 2008 Cone-Omicron consumer study revealed some telling trends among social media users as outlined in the following diagram:



Although slow to catch on to this trend at first, companies are starting to pay attention. In fact, according to a US Interactive Marketing Forecast Online Survey² of marketing firms conducted in 2009, Forrester analysts predict that interactive marketing (which includes social media) will represent 21% of all marketing spend by 2014.

According to Forrester, almost 86% of marketers currently have or are building social media applications. Companies know they no longer can afford to ignore it as a passing fad. It is indeed a fast-moving revolution, representing a fundamental shift in the way we prefer to communicate. However, jumping aboard this moving train has its risks—and success depends on overcoming some key challenges.

Small Business Challenges in Social Media Marketing

There are three primary obstacles that small business owners face in deciding how to move forward with social media:

- Which social media platforms
- Understanding how to use it to build business
- Time management issues
- Knowing which tasks are safe to delegate

1. Which Social Media Platforms?

So many choices and each having a different audience and opportunity in which to leverage for your business, these different platforms need to be understood and drive the right type of content. Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Slideshare, YouTube and Flickr to name a few. Each has a different way to help in your marketing needs and address your audience needs.



2. Understanding how do I use social media to build my business.

Trying to keep up with new platforms and changes in technology can feel like information overload for small business owners. Business networking sites like LinkedIn and Plaxo and social networks such as Facebook, and Twitter all have differing rules and terms of usage. Another layer of complexity is the recent advances in mobile technology.

Business owners often ask:

- “What sites do I use?”
- “What are their purposes?”
- “How do I determine which one best suits my audience?”

If these questions sound familiar, you’re not alone. According to the Social Media Marketing Industry Report, which surveyed almost 900 businesses, most respondents reported being new to using social media.

The following info taken from the report shows that most are either just getting started, or at best only have been using social media for a few months:

- 28% Just getting started
- 44% Been doing this for a few months
- 23% Been doing this for a few years
- 4% No Experience, but plan to use social media
- 1% No Experience, do not plan to use social media

Business owners are used to deploying marketing concepts that have been proven over time, however, the fast pace of social media marketing causes angst. Manuals and guides are showing up everywhere online —but how do you know which is right?

To add to the confusion, the new media concepts of **transparency**, **community building**, and **interactivity** seem foreign to many small businesses. Even measuring return on investment (ROI) is different in this area. People new to social media are often puzzled by the differences, and can end up making mistakes that cost them time and money when they respond to pressure to jump in without learning the different platforms and what they have to offer first.

3. How do I Find the Time?

The small business owners we talk to know that social media needs to be done and done well. However, they often have staffing concerns.

Here are some of the concerns:

“Top questions are:

- ‘Is there someone on my staff that I can assign this to?’
- If so, what will I be taking them away from?’
- Do I need to hire somebody?’

If the business owner decides to hire someone, there are concerns about the time needed to train that person in the business as well as the business’s social media strategy. If a business already has a marketing plan, they need to know that the new hire can implement it. They may need different levels of people depending on the business’s positioning.

So where should businesses look for qualified help with social media?

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That often depends on the level of help they need, and their available personnel resources. It takes time to come up with a social media marketing strategy—and implementing it requires an ongoing commitment as well. This creates a dilemma for small business owners already overworked and trying to drive sales.

4. How do I Know what is safe to delegate—and to whom?

Businesses concerned about being left behind their faster-moving competitors in the social media space often make a critical mistake. They respond to panic by jumping in feet first, thinking it's better to act immediately and learn as they go.

Reacting to panic can have unexpected (and unpleasant) results. There are many horror stories circulating on the web of companies who handed off the wrong social media tasks to the wrong people—and paid a stiff price in poor reflection of brand, lost revenue and time.

Other problems that can occur when handing off tasks include plagiarized content, posting unprofessional material, violated SPAM rules, and ignored or mishandled customer complaints—all of which can be expensive to fix.

Many business owners who are new to social media voice concern over these issues, and feel overwhelmed by all the changes taking place around them. However, if we take a brief look at history it can give you some insight into what it took to move forward with other solutions over the years..

For Example:

How many years did it take to reach 50 million users:

TV – 13 years

Radio- 38 years

Internet- 4 years

Social Media Networks – Facebook- 100 million users in 9 months

The birth of social networks made it much easier for people to interact and talk about their experiences with brands. However, this is a two-edged sword for businesses. On the one hand, you have more opportunities than ever before to connect with their audience. On the other hand, your business needs to stay on top of the conversations happening around your brand—much of which is out of your control.

Fortunately, there is help for the small business owner who doesn't have time to keep up with all the changing technologies and techniques, but still needs to use social media for marketing. A new breed of professionals is growing out of the industry to help time-challenged marketers incorporate social media into the mix.

How to select the right social media expert or consultant to help you leverage social media?

- How long have they been in the social media practice?
- Do they walk the talk or only talk the talk?
- How involved are they in this space?



- Are they on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and/or do they have a blog?
- What is their reputation in the industry?
- Are they versatile enough to understand your industry or needs?
- Examples of work done? (remember this is a new industry but many have been doing some of this for a long time such as blogs or newsletters or chats)
- Can they build a strategy plan for you? Does it include a timeline and marketing initiatives included?

What else is needed in a skill set for providing you social media strategy or implementation?

- Marketing skills,
- content knowledge,
- user profiles and needs,
- understands how to maneuver around a small or large organization so that they incorporate over all company

What are some warning signs of why not to hire?

- Focused on one platform
- Guaranteeing instant return on ROI (it takes 3-6 months for real results to start)
- Not incorporating different people with in your organization as part of the plan

When looking for a virtual social media consulting service, it can help to keep these important considerations in mind:

Ask for specifics: Does the service have references? They should be able to give you some real time results of what they were able to achieve for other companies. What detailed steps do they take with a client to meet their needs?

Experience with your business type: Ask for examples of how the service and/or can solve specific problems your business faces, and whether they have documented experience in implementing these types of strategies.

Education: Although social media is a new industry, look for evidence of education and ongoing training.

Do they walk the talk? Look at the consultant's social media profiles and make sure they look polished. Observe their connections and how well they've integrated their own profiles/positioning.

Extensive network: An ideal provider will have an extensive network of qualified experts and the ability to outsource if necessary. They should be able to make recommendations if you need services in conjunction with theirs, such as web/graphic design.

Full-time availability: The best providers have full-time businesses...not part-time jobs they "do on the side." To be assured of responsiveness when you need it, make sure your provider can be reached during your business hours.



Turnaround time: Look for a service with time on the books to handle your strategy or implementation. Ask in advance how long it will take them to implement and get it going. Ask for milestone dates, such as when can you have the first draft, and pay attention to how long it takes them to respond to your questions and emails.

Implementation plan documentation: The ideal consultant will offer a written operations guide for your social media strategy, and be willing to train you and your staff on its implementation.

Payment options: Especially for start-up companies on a tight budget, be sure to work with a service that bills in actual time spent for activities or if you need ongoing support review their service retainer model. Ask what all is included in the retainer model.

Extensive Business Background: Should have extensive experience with not just Social media but online web applications and communication. Ideally, your provider should have previous business experience in marketing, sales, setting up systems, and project management.

Virtual experience: Look for a provider with at least two years of experience working virtually. Inexperienced providers may not have the equipment or software required to work virtually from a home office.

Experience managing teams: Seek a provider who has managed both physical and virtual teams. In managing your Social media business solution, your provider should be comfortable working with your staff members as well as other vendors.

Make sure after you hire someone that you have someone on your team or in your company that can learn what they need to about social media. Send them for training or if you plan to keep this virtual consultant onboard make sure to incorporate them into your business so that they are representing you the best they can to the outside world through social media.

If you have questions or need to talk to someone on how to get started on social media or you have started dabbling in it and need to take it to the next level TheSocialExpert LLC is available to help you. We have been working with social media for 4 ½ years and web for over 12 years in different industries and with small to medium size businesses including Universities, Healthcare, Pharma and Manufacturing. TheSocialExpert is a DesignDotCom Corp company.

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