

Using online tools to get the word out

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“I estimate that 75 percent of people I've known don't know what I do as a profession. That's probably not good. What do you suggest? “

Knowing what I do about this business owner, I believe his network of past connections could easily be referral sources. He has a good reputation and sells a service to both businesses and consumers. His background includes a lot of high school and college sports, right in the backyard of where he's now working. He has everything to gain by connecting with people he used to know and asking them to get the word out that he's looking for more business.

The first step is to make the Internet your friend. The Internet is one of the cheapest and fastest ways to get the word out. Facebook, Twitter, Linked-In, blogging, alumni websites, your own website and new releases that point to your website are all Internet tools. If you're not familiar with them, now is the time to get familiar.

About Facebook

Facebook exists on both a personal and business level. Be very deliberate at separating the two. You don't want a 13-year-old making comments about her latest boyfriend on your business website. Point the non-business friends to the personal website.

Get the message out via Facebook about what your business is, and what your business does. Build fans who are business related. Track progress by monitoring the number of Facebook fans you have and set goals with your fans to help you achieve them. It works on the theory of one friend tells two friends who tell four friends - you get the idea.

On Facebook you will need to provide a consistent flow of information about your company. Make sure people have a clear understanding of what your business is, why they are engaging with your business site and why they should bring their friends or business colleagues to your site.

Once you make the commitment to using Facebook, it needs to be done consistently. Have someone on staff whose job it is to manage the businesses' Facebook account. Each week have a meeting to discuss what to post.

Feature events. Announce things that are happening in the company such as new employees or new services. If you work Facebook in a consistent dedicated fashion you control the flow of what goes out to people. It is a free way to wave the flag in front of people.

You can also do advertising on Facebook to attract more fans. You can specify that you want members who have a specific interest, in a particular geography and age range. This targeted approach helps to bring in contacts who it might take longer to reach through friends.

You have to write a compelling, clear ad to get people to respond. Motivate your target to take action. Give away something. Make the questions short and effective. Are you ___? Interested in _____?

Lead the Way

Next comes Twitter. It's 140 characters of compelling, immediate information. Always follow people, as well as being followed - link both ways. Use Twitter to be in front of your target audience, with information they may want to engage with, on a repeated basis.

The best examples of Twitter are companies that announce specials or events that are real-time in nature: "Come have a cup of coffee with me at the corner coffee shop at 8 am on Tuesday." "Here's what we're doing this week that's special."

If you're learning something unusual, visiting someplace unusual, put it out there on Twitter. Let the world know that you're doing interesting things, which makes it worth following you. It's also easier to write a journal type of entry every few days,

if you're involved in a project that people might want to know about. Demonstrate your expertise by talking about how you do what you do - in enough detail to be interesting, without so much information to be boring.

There's a new feature on Twitter. Re-Tweet someone who follows you. Share past information, as long as it's relevant, with people who've just come to you.

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