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## Building Your Brand with Social Media

Five steps to establishing a credible online presence for your small business.

Susan Gunelius | January 5, 2011

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Tapping the vast audience of the social Web is a low-cost way to catapult a small-business brand onto the global arena. Building your brand using social media allows you to develop new (and strengthen existing) relationships, which often leads to everything from brand awareness, loyalty and word-of-mouth marketing.

While perhaps initially daunting, the trick is to break the process into manageable pieces. From creating your online destinations to connecting with influencers, following these five steps will get you on your way to building your brand and boosting your business.

### 1. Create branded online destinations.

This is the first step to raising brand awareness and loyalty. Companies with the most successful social media branding surround consumers with online experiences that allow them to select how they interact with the brand.

Consider using popular, free options like blogs, [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [YouTube](#), and so on. Of course, for small-business owners without the manpower to effectively manage too many destinations, you should consider testing each of these to determine which social media service you're most likely to stick with over the long haul. This will become your core destination. All your other online destinations should link back to the core.

### 2. Establish entry points.

One of the most important aspects to accomplishing this with your branded online destinations is to continually publish meaningful content that adds value to the reader's experience. The goal is to publish useful information that people will want to talk about -- and then share with their own audiences. This creates additional ways for people to find your branded destinations and it can lead to higher rankings from search engines like Google.

Here's one way to think about it: If you have a website with 10 pages of content, there are 10 ways for search engines to find your site. If you attach a blog to that website and write a new post every day for a year, you will have 365 more ways for Google to find your site, and your brand.

I call this the compounding effect of blogging. You cannot buy that kind of access to a global audience.

### 3. Locate your target audience and bring them back with you.

Where does your target audience already spend time? You need to spend time in those places, too, and engage in the conversations happening there. Get started by conducting a Google search for keywords that consumers would be likely to



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use when searching for a business or products like yours. Follow the paths that those consumers would follow and you're likely to find them.

Join relevant online forums and/or blogs, and write posts, publish comments and answer questions. Once that audience understands that you're there to genuinely offer useful information and not to self-promote, you can start leading them to your own branded destinations -- particularly your core branded online destination.

#### 4. Connect with influencers.

As you search for your target audience, you should identify online influencers in those communities and get on their respective radars. To do so, leave comments on their blogs, follow them on Twitter and retweet their content. You can even email them to introduce yourself.

The key is to make sure they know your name and understand that you add value to the online conversation. This also exposes you to their audiences.

#### 5. Give more than you receive.

Success in social media marketing depends on being useful and developing relationships. If you spend all of your time promoting then no one will want to listen to you. It's not a short-term tactic, rather a long-term strategy that can deliver sustainable, organic growth through ongoing, consistent participation.

A good rule of thumb is to apply the 80-20 rule to your social media marketing efforts. Spend no more than 20 percent of your time in self-promotional activities and conversations, and at least 80 percent on non-self-promotional activities. In time, you'll see your business grow from your efforts. And it starts with leveraging these fundamentals.



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