Social Media Best Practise

The big three: Blogging, Twitter & Facebook

1. **Blogging**

For some reason, many business owners shy away from blogs. What they don't realise is that most business "News" sections are blogs. "Blog" simply defines any continually updated news or content section of a site.

So why is a blog important? Firstly, it shows that you know what you're talking about. It helps you identify yourself as an expert or unique. Secondly, because a blog is constantly updated. It gives readers a reason to come back to your site. The more contact you have with your consumers, the more likely they are to buy from you. Also, consumers have become savvier and will search out information. They want more than a simple explanation of what your product is or does. They want resources, inside information and examples of interesting things writers and readers are doing. Websites need to have constantly changing (at least weekly) with fresh front page material to attract search engines. They need to attract search engines to reach readers and they need to engage readers to keep them coming back. That's why blogs are an essential part of many websites today.

Examples:

Faber & Faber

NZ Book Council

Ideally you want your website and blog to share the same Domain name to improve your Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) but I'll talk more about SEO later.

Whether you are blogging as a publicist or encouraging your writers to blog it is all about building readership and loyalty and thereby sales. That's why its a great idea to make sure you have prompts on the blog for readers to join your email list, Facebook group etc as these give you a greater opportunity for direct marketing.

You don't have to spend large amounts of money setting up a blog. You can either use a free service like wordpress.com, which is a great starting point for an author or, for a

more business like approach, you can use free templates/Content Management Systems (CMS) from Wordpress.org or Drupal to set up your own website but these need some tech savvy, hosting services and possibly designers to set up. They also have ongoing hosting and maintenance costs and requirements. Another good option for authors or small businesses is Typepad which allows for your own domain name coupled with easy to use CMS, templates and supported hosting for a reasonable monthly fee. This is a good step-up option after a free blog.

Top Ten Tips

- Content is King.

Learn how to write great headlines and content. Read up at websites like copyblogger.com. This is good for copywriting in general not just online. What's the difference between copy and content? Copy is what copywriters do. Copy is often strong on marketing and persuasion. Copy is words only. Copywriters are writing specialists.

Content is solid and worthy. Content is a business asset. Content endures and must be planned, managed, reviewed, refreshed and culled. Content is typically written by subject experts, not writing experts. Content includes video, audio and graphics—and copy. (Via Contented)

Oh, and proofread all your writing and links, please! Otherwise all your great copy may be for nothing.

- Plan, plan, plan.

Write up a schedule of posts. Get a month's worth of draft posts written in preparation, keep ahead of schedule. This doesn't mean to say you can't also pop in some impromptu posts it just means you are prepared.

- Be consistent.

This isn't hard if you have planned! You need to post regularly or no-one comes back, they drift away. You also need to be consistent with your tone, find your voice and stick to it.

- Entertain.

People are reading because they want to hear a story. You can be personal or at least a persona, this will really boost your connection to your readers.

- Engage.

Entertaining is one way of connecting with your readers but just as important is replying to comments. This is after all "Social" media. If you never reply to people they will drift off.

- Make it easy for people to find you.

Use categories and tags, name images with relevant key words, make your links contain key words that mean some thing. All these things affect SEO and therefore help people find you.

- Make it easy for readers to spread the word.

Having easy to find and easy to use "share", "Tweet", "Like" etc buttons will boost the way your content is spread across the internet.

- Multimedia is the future.

Podcasts and Video use has grown and will continue to grow. Shortly it will be expected content. So get set up to use it.

- Design – KISS.

Keep It Simple Stupid - keep it clean, keep it readable.

- Measure your success.

You can't justify your use of any platform if you can't measure it's Return on Investment (ROI). Google analytics is free, so are Stat Counter and many others. I use both.

Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) for small businesses and personal websites
There are whole books written on SEO but I'll break it down to basics. In short SEO refers to how you structure your website, mostly in terms of design and keywords and phrases in the search engines. Google is the most used search engine. Google tries to think how its users think. Generally people search for one of three reasons:

- They want information – they have a question they want answered.
- They want to buy something.
- They're bored.

Search is competitive, Google don't want you using Yahoo. Conservative estimates indicate that Google makes over 90% of its money through paid search (Adwords). People pay because that's where the punters are. If people stop searching then Google loses its income. So they do everything they can to get you the most relevant answers to your questions.

The Key Words in your content need to be highly focussed (eg. not just "Books" but "Crime Fiction"). Brainstorm questions people might ask to find your product – eg: "How do you make a Pavalova" for a cook book, etc. Incorporate those questions into your copy.

Other things that affect your "Googleability" or page rank are:

- incoming links from other sites such as directories - you need to have your site listed on as many directories and peer's sites as possible.
- Also the bigger your site, or the more pages it has, the higher you will rank.
- The closer your keywords match your products the higher you rank.
- The more relvant your link keywords are the better, don't link to some thing by saying look here, say visit HelenHeath.com.
- If you participate in industry forums then links in your signature help drive people to your site as do comments on other blogs.

Don't spend all your time fretting about page rank and SEO, just follow good practise and get on with things.

2. Twitter

Twitter is a tool that any serious web publisher needs to use in order to gain maximum exposure for content. Twitter is changing the way information spreads online. Links that would have been blogged a couple of years ago are now more often shared via the micro-blogging service instead, which fundamentally changes strategy when trying to get content to spread.

Ten Top Tips

- Branding.

You really need to have a branded profile page, you can upload your own background. Think of this as an opportunity to use free adverting space. Tie it in with your blog design and use something similar for your Facebook fan page.

- Connect with customers and industry peers on a more personal level.

It's not just about churning out press releases, it's about relationship building.

- Follow your "right people", your "Tribe" – readers, writers, media, industry peers etc

There's no point following people who don't share your interests or don't follow you back (unless they provide cutting edge news). The right crowd will make your job a whole lot easier.

- Plan.

Just like blogging you need to plan ahead. If you use a tool like Hootsuite then you can line up delayed tweets in advance then just duck in a couple of times a day to check breaking news.

- Present useful, relevant material.

Like with blogging content is king. If you can't provide useful, relevant content at least be entertaining. Spread industry news for example.

- Monitor.

Use your tools like Hootsuite, Tweetdeck or just plain old twitter search and hash tags to monitor mentions of your product and brand. Follow up on complaints. Make lists.

- Measure your success.

As with blogging you need to evaluate ROI. Hootsuite has a good stats function.

- Engage & Entertain.

Imagine it as the time a shopkeeper spends chatting to customers, building trust before taking them to the counter to make the sale. However this is NOT about being a fake buddy just to make a sale.

- Be consistent.

As per the blogging tip, post regularly and keep the tone or persona the same.

- Make it easy for people to find you.

Pick an obvious and appropriate twitter handle. Fill out all the profile information. Use hashtags in your tweets. Put your twitter handle in your email signature, business card, website etc

A hashtag is using the # sign to the front of a word or combinations of words. It will only be a searchable hashtag if it is joined together without spaces and without punctuation. They are used by interest groups or communities to keep track of each other. For example people tweeting from the South by South West conference use #SXSW. A popular hastag for writers is #amwriting.

ReTweets

Getting your content "ReTweeted" on Twitter (i.e. getting people to repeat what you've said, usually along with a link) can drive significant quality traffic to your site, which in turn can boost your subscriber numbers. Nearly every form of viral sharing includes some form of social proof. People have a natural tendency toward imitation, especially of those who they assume have more or better information than themselves. The likelihood of a tweet being ReTweeted increases dramatically each time it is Retweeted.

Popular topics include: How Tos and Instructional Content; News, especially breaking news; Warnings (eg about scams); Freebies and Contests. There are 2 main factors

you need to take into account when trying to get your content to spread virally on Twitter.

1. Call to Action

ReTweeting is an action you wish your readers to take, and, like any other action, the best way to persuade people to do it is to ask them to. And when a user ReTweets your content, they're very likely to also repost your call to action, lending it their credibility and influence. "Please RT" is the most common call to action other variations Check out..., Follow this person, Questions, e.g. "What do you think of…"

2. Timing

There is a window of time during which sharing occurs more often. The first few days of the business week, Monday through Wednesday, typically see more ReTweeting than Thursday, Friday and the weekend. Time of day also seems to be important; between 9am and 6pm the amount of ReTweets sees a sharp increase. So if you want your content to be ReTweeted it is advisable to post it during that window.

A couple of interesting links:

Interesting blog post on Twitter literacy

Why Twitter is the future of news

3. Facebook

The average Facebook user uses Facebook not for business but for personal communications. For a business, you should create an official business Page. Take the time to ensure your category is relevant.

I don't recommend creating a Facebook Group. They do not support Facebook Markup Language (FBML) or Facebook Apps, so they are not as interactive and so don't make such an impact. You shouldn't really create a personal account (a regular Facebook profile page) for your business. You're supposed to use your real name and you're also only supposed to have one account. Your Facebook Page should be created under your primary Facebook login. If you elect not to have one, you can still create a Facebook page by following the steps after you fill out the relevant data for your business Facebook Page. However beware - the profile you create the business page from can't, at this point in time, be disconnected later.

Use a relevant and obvious name for your page because you won't be able to change it later. Don't create a funny character or other business persona that nobody can relate to. People will be looking for your business on Facebook, make it easy for them to find you.

Once you get 25 fans, you can set up a username which makes accessing your profile a lot easier. Make sure you apply the username to your Facebook Page, not your personal profile, and be sure to use something memorable that people can find by plugging in the URL.

You can upload a profile picture (200 by 600 pixels maximum, which I recommend you make the most of) and start filling out the relevant details about your business. Tell people how to find you and give them a history. Use what's available to you to your advantage. Don't shy away from giving your community the information needed to find you elsewhere both online and offline.

If you want to be more creative, start thinking about building upon your profile with the Facebook Markup Language (FBML).

The more you engage your community, which could be as simple as asking your followers how they are going to be spending Easter or sharing an interesting link, the more visible your page is to your Fan's friends. Every interaction shows up on the Fan's news feed. And that translates to more visits, which you'll start seeing when you receive a weekly email from Facebook entitled "Your Weekly Facebook Page Update" that features fun statistics like these:

    +10 Fans this week (976 total Fans)

    31 Wall Posts, Comments, and Likes this week (68 last week)

    765 visits to your page this week (869 visits last week)

Engagement is not limited to wall posts. Post photos of your service and product offerings and invite your fans to do the same. Ask for reviews from your community to see what they think about your products. If you offer great value and have firm believers amongst your midst, you have nothing to fear.

Offer different content to your different audiences. Don't just broadcast the same messages to your Twitter and Facebook followers.

At some point it's quite possible you'll end up handling customer service issues. People don't care who is running the social media presence online; if it's the marketing department, they'll still demand technical support. Do what you can to help or put them in contact with the right person, good customer service is good social media marketing.

4 Direct Marketing

One of the main reasons for using social media is to drive traffic to your website for sales. The other is to build your mailing list for direct marketing purposes. Direct marketing has become associated with spam and junk mail. The best way to disassociate yourself from those connotations is Opt-in e-mail advertising, or permission marketing, a method of advertising via e-mail whereby the recipient of the advertisement has consented to receive it.

If opt-in e-mail advertising is used, the material that is e-mailed to consumers will be "anticipated". It is assumed that the consumer wants to receive it, which makes it unlike unsolicited advertisements sent to the consumer. Ideally, opt-in e-mail advertisements will be more personal and relevant to the consumer than untargeted advertisements.

Free Resources & websites:

Social Media Etiquette Handbook

Marianne's easy to use Twitter guide

Mashable

Copyblogger