

Does social media suck for B2B?

In the last few years every business has jumped on the social media bandwagon. It has fragmented marketing budgets and sucked up time and money, but to what end? Clare Coulson set out to get an idea if every business really needs to engage and reports back social-media style...

Social media could be defined as “a way of connecting a billion people socially so we can look at pictures of cats and argue with people who we don’t know”. It has also been said to be “a powerful marketing and networking tool to ignore at your peril”. The earliest social media network was the long-forgotten Six Degrees. Since then, the likes of Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube and increasingly Pinterest, have revolutionised the way we socialise and do business by creating interactive platforms through which individuals and communities can share, co-create, discuss, and modify user-generated content. They are more immediate than traditional media, have a wider reach and can be updated more frequently, but they can also suffer in content quality, journalistic balance and integrity.

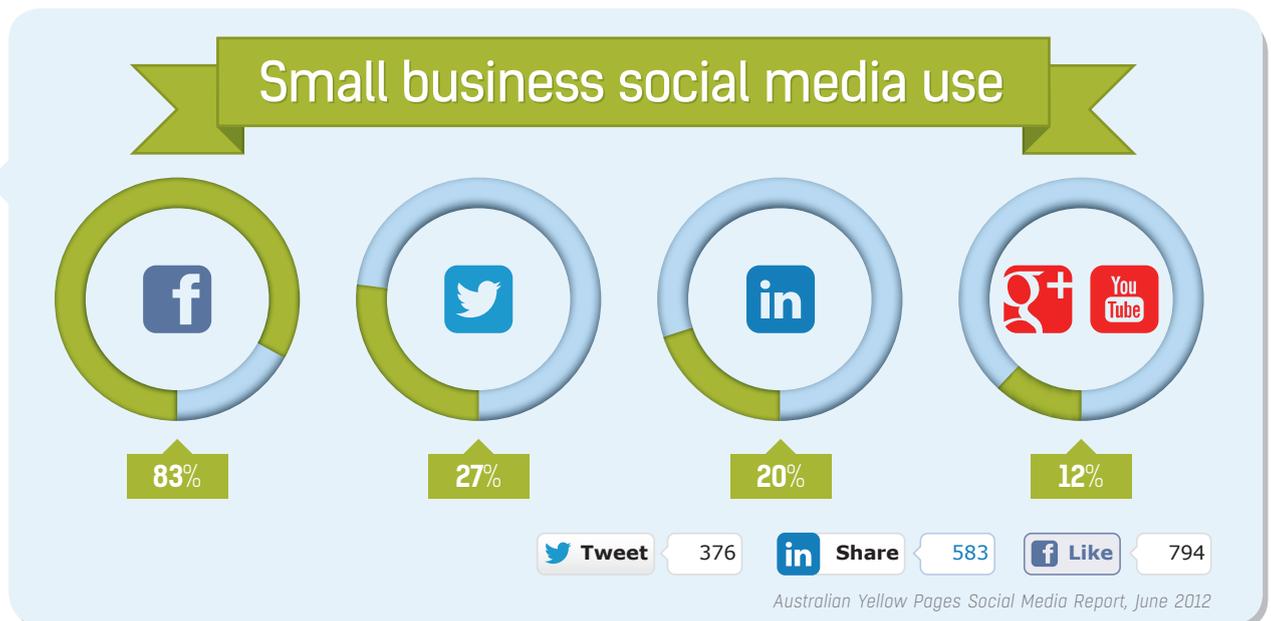
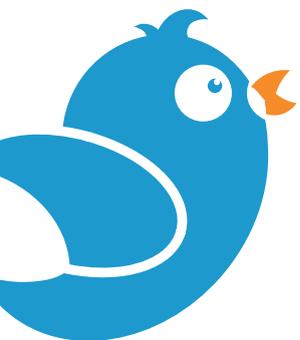
Who needs social media?

So, does every business need social media? There is no end of blogs and websites dedicated to social media and how it is such a great marketing tool.

But don’t forget most are run by people who make a living advising business on social media. Blogger Ramsay (no last name), formerly known as the Blog Tyrant, says, “Let’s start by saying that everyone should have a Facebook Page and a website with a blog regardless of what you do. That is the basis for all social media activity. Once you become somewhat experienced at blogging and using Facebook you can decide what other social media platforms you want to use.”

According to the *Yellow Pages Social Media Report*, June 2012, 83% of Australian small business are using Facebook, 27% Twitter, 20% are on LinkedIn and approximately 12% are using Google Plus or YouTube. Overall, on average businesses are spending over \$3000 a year on their social media presence.

A recent survey by Telstra showed that only 24 percent of small and medium businesses had embraced social media and felt it was delivering any significant benefit. What is more, 12 percent actually considered social media a hindrance.



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How should we use social media?

Will Irving, group managing director of Telstra Business which ran the Telstra survey, says that with 62 percent of adults worldwide now using social media, SMBs ignoring this powerful tool were missing out on a significant business opportunity.

"In a digital age where smartphones and tablets are used on a daily basis, we know customers expect a company to have a social media presence. Successful Australian businesses are having a two-way conversation with customers online, allowing them to connect and engage on a personal level, either by providing real-time customer service or highlighting relevant new products."

The Bibby Barometer, which is conducted bi-annually and surveys more than 200 small, non-retail businesses has shown that 78 percent of small businesses in Australia are planning to spend more time on social media in the coming 12 months. Of those businesses surveyed, as many as 65 percent report that social media has helped their business grow over the past 12 months. Almost half are using social media to raise brand awareness and source new customers, whilst 40 percent are using it to generate new sales and 44 percent to provide networking opportunities, effectively contributing to business growth.

And it is not just small and medium businesses that are using social media - everyone from Coca-Cola to Deloitte to the Commonwealth Bank are 'on social media'.

So what does this mean?

Social can be a scary beast because, as Adam Helweh from the Social Media Explorer says, social media shifts the limelight from brands to the customers. It forces companies to be more human and has changed the direction of marketing and sales from outbound to inbound.

Helweh concludes his self-confessed facetiously entitled blog post 'Social media sucks for businesses and here's why' with the following:

"There are still plenty of business owners and C-level folks who think of social media as a flash in the pan or all fun and games. The bottom line is that it's a reality. Applying social media to business takes effort, time, commitment and empathy. To those that continue to dismiss social media before doing their due diligence, social media is going to continue to suck."



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Clare Coulson-Dalton

So, just what are businesses saying about social media according to the Bibby Barometer?

78%	intend to spend more time using social media
65%	say social media has helped their business grow
50%	use it to raise brand awareness
40%	use it to generated new sales
44%	use it to provide networking opportunities

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#doesyourbusinessneedsocialmedia

We jumped on Facebook and asked some of the top social media marketing experts if social media sucked for B2B marketing and here is what they said.



Simon Young

Does social media suck? It most certainly does, which is why it's perfect for 21st century marketing.

By "suck" I mean, pull towards. 20th century marketing blows ... social media sucks. But maybe let's use the word "attract", ok? ;)

Like · Comment · March 26 at 12:35pm

👍 Social media sucks for B2B likes this.



Social media sucks for B2B Loving the word play – but isn't that all just sales and marketing puffery... How does it attract for B2B and how meaningful is that attraction. Don't you have to say something really provocative to cut through all the noise, even if it's not your brand's way?

March 27 at 12:57pm · Like · 👍 1



Simon Young Oh, very good question! I think it has to be "your brand's way" ... but then, a brand needs to have an opinion. If it doesn't have an opinion, more substantial work is needed on brand development.



Craig Woolhouse

If the social media revolution could be summed up in one sentence it would go something like this "A powerful tool to connecting a billion people socially so we can look at pictures of cats and argue with people that we don't know"

Is social media a good idea for B2B?

I really think it depends on what your company does. For the likes of a company supplying services such as the phone lines, internet, web hosting or similar then it can be a valuable tool when used to communicate with stakeholders during outages. However in my experience that has been about the most useful thing. Now I am not talking about Air New Zealand or similar who do a great job on their facebook but I am looking at more small to medium B2B companies. I often get asked is this something we should be doing? and mostly I reply about where is their time most effectively spent to generate a return from their online marketing. And most of the time it's their website. Facebook is there for brand development, so our clients can see when someone brings chocolate cake to work or when the staff members dress for Halloween. If this is important to your client (which it's not) then by all means post away and see how quickly

you pollute someones facebook wall until they 'unlike' you. Why not spend that time and money on Google Adwords and start driving some targeted specific visitors to your site. If you have the time why not continually optimise your site for conversions (using split testing or similar). This will give you a far better return than a photo of the boss's cat asleep on a laptop.

Like · Comment · March 20 at 9:52am

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Social media sucks for B2B

So, for example, if I'm a medium-sized manufacturer with say 100 staff, selling widgets via a distribution network, should I be all over social media? I mean, how exactly would it help?

Like · Comment · March 22



Simon Young Always a good question to ask is, what do I want to do, and how am I trying to achieve that now, and how's that working? Social media is a bit of a Swiss army knife, it can do many things, but what matters most is how it's used to meet your objectives.

So for a manufacturer, you might be looking to boost your relationships with partners, suppliers and customers. Great news, social media is all about relationships. It's just not purely one-to-one as, say, email is. It's many-to-many.

So you have the opportunity not just to build one-on-one relationships with your customers, but to help them connect with each other. The best salespeople do this instinctively.

March 26 at 12:34pm · Like



Social media sucks for B2B That's all very well, but can you give some practical examples of how a widget manufacturer could use social media to boost relationships? What sort of time investment are we talking – and for what kind of return?

March 27 at 1:00pm · Like



Lee Hopkins A widget manufacturer would have multiple stakeholders -- organisations and individuals that interact with it. Each of those stakeholder groups could be researched as to how they best prefer to be communicated with. If one of them says, for example, via Twitter, or via Facebook, then that is where the widget manufacturer needs to be. There is so much competition now -- for customers,

for credible suppliers -- that the smartest businesses are communicating with their employees and external stakeholders via the mediums they prefer best. Sometimes that means broadcasting the same message across multiple mediums.

April 2 at 5:23pm · Like



Social media sucks for B2B C'mon Lee – when did you last speak with a manufacturer who wanted their supplier or customer communications to be shared in a social setting? Telephone and email prevail in the real world where real people do real work – because they are proven, and simple. Websites do the rest. Those that are doing social are only doing it because the junior sales/marketing staff or their external PR/comms advisors (the same juniors) have told them that "they have to be there". As time goes on it's becoming clearer that, actually, they don't. We're after some real examples where it really has worked – got any?

April 3 at 8:44am · Like



Lee Hopkins Got me. Nope.

April 3 at 2:41pm · Like



Marnie Davey depends ... are your 'widgets' part of a bigger widget? or does your distribution network sell your widget on its own? if it's the latter, then I would suggest you would be using social media to generate demand for your widget amongst the end-consumers. say it was a car widget, you might 'like' car pages and engage with people on those pages who have a problem your widget solves, or join discussion forums, like the one for my car model where I just found out a lot of things. what if it was a household widget? you might find (at the risk of seeming sexist) housewife type pages where your end-consumers gather and interact in ways that will benefit them. I know the marketing manager of a manufacturing company, probably bigger than you are thinking, and that's what they do. I work for a b2b software company, that's what we do.

April 3 at 4:14pm · Like

6

Six reasons to use LinkedIn for B2B

Earlier this year LinkedIn broke through the 200 million member barrier and is continuing to grow by two new members per second. It has been dubbed the social network for professionals and, according to a LinkedIn survey of approx 2000 members, 87 percent of respondents said they trust it as "a source of information affecting decision making". Here is a resume of what experienced online media consultant Nancy Verbrugge listed as her top six reasons for using LinkedIn as a B2B marketer, as posted on the Social Marketing Forum blog.

- 1. Create awareness and improve reputation** – by increasing your online presence using the different personal and group features in LinkedIn, to improve your visibility and credibility as an individual and, therefore, as your company's brand.
- 2. Thought leadership and influencer marketing** – provide high-quality content, improve your personal profile and participate in LinkedIn communities to become a trusted advisor in your field.
- 3. Selling and generating leads** – on top of traditional techniques, listen, analyse, participate, share, network and respond to questions and the leads will come to you.
- 4. Social CRM** – it allows you to see what your contacts are doing on LinkedIn in real-time, offering valuable additional information on their behavior and preferences.
- 5. Traffic building** – LinkedIn has a social sharing button that enables you to share content in your status updates and in LinkedIn Groups.
- 6. Listening and gaining insights** – perfect for listening, asking questions and gaining insights.



*Should you pin your hopes on Pinterest?
Software company Intuit, which appears to specialise on all things online, teamed up with Column Five Media, to create a nifty infographic on whether you should be using Pinterest for your business marketing.*

How to get heard

Telstra offers the following tips for engaging your followers:

- Be the real you. Being authentic and representative of who you are and the values your business stands for is essential.
- Know why you're there and be relevant. What would your customers like to see from you online?
- Ask (and search) for feedback. Facebook's new search tool and searching Twitter is a gold mine of insights into what you're doing well and how you can improve.
- It's a two way street. Joining the conversation is essential. Stories or photos of your business can generate engagement from both current and prospective customers.
- Choose the right social places for your business. Look beyond Facebook and Twitter to services such as Yelp, Foursquare and Instagram.
- Don't forget to protect your turf. Choose a simple social media name for your business - avoid underscores and tricky characters, they're not friendly on mobile devices.

Tweet 46
 Share 109
 Like 13

The trap of social media noise

Blogger and social media clever cat Seth Godin has a warning for social media strategies that are too focused on the number of followers and likes. He says the conventional wisdom of following lots of people to get followed back, focusing on number of followers rather than interests, link pumping and offering no value or context is “broken”.

It might look like winning because the numbers are going up but “it’s actually a double-edged form of losing”, he explains.

“First, you’re polluting a powerful space, turning signals into noise and bringing down the level of discourse for everyone. And second, you’re wasting your time when you could be building a tribe instead, could be earning permission, could be creating a channel where your voice is actually welcomed.

“Leadership (even idea leadership) scares many people, because it requires you to own your words, to do work that matters. The alternative is to be a junk dealer.

“The game theory pushes us into one of two directions: either be better at pump and dump than anyone else, get your numbers into the millions, outmass those that choose to use mass and always dance at the edge of spam (in which the number of those you offend or turn off forever keeps increasing), or

“Relentlessly focus. Prune your message and your list and build a reputation that’s worth owning and an audience that cares.

“Only one of these strategies builds an asset of value.”

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