

Drive Customers to Your Business

Benefit From Zero Cost Online Marketing Strategies

Do you think marketing your business online has to be an expensive proposition? Think again! You can promote your store effectively at little to no cost using the same social media tools that your customers are using.

Think about that for a minute ... you can reach your loyal customers and gain new ones at no cost by investing just a little time, meeting them where they already are – online.

With over 250 million active users, it's safe to say that at least a portion of your customer base is on Facebook. It's no longer the domain of college students, but the online hangout for moms, dads, grandparents, and more importantly – people of all ages and interests from your locale.

Using Facebook for Business

Maybe you're already using Facebook to stay in touch with friends and family. A business page offers the same easy-to-use, easy-to-look-at functionality, but it's all business. Your business page can sport up-to-the-minute status updates that any "fan" will see on their own news wall.

House of Flowers, a florist in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, started a Facebook business page in March of 2009. They found it to be a quick, effective form of communication with their customers about new in-store and online products. Within three months, they had acquired nearly 150 fans and had more than 30 fan interactions through customer postings to their wall.

Their primary goals are to boost in-store traffic on non-peak hours and to drive e-commerce sales. In working to achieve these goals, they use short, weekly, mixed-media updates (a combination of photos, videos, and shop news) to keep the attention of their fans. Their strategy is working, as evidenced by their growing fan base.

A social media plan that involves Facebook does not require a huge time investment or any outlay of funds. This tool can be used effectively by any business owner who's willing to commit a minimal amount of time each week. First you set up the page, and then you regularly update it with fresh, interesting information. It's easy and it's free!

Of course, Facebook isn't the only game in town.

Twitter: Waste of Time or Useful Business Tool?

It seems the whole world is on Twitter. What's all the buzz about?

At first glance, honestly, we couldn't see how Twitter would hold value for business owners or anyone else. But thankfully, we didn't stop at first glance. Twitter lets you tell the world about your store specials and events, interact with your customer base, and even solve problems before they become troublesome.

When the new monitor, video card, and extra RAM for my computer arrived this past winter, I was excited to receive it. This marked the end of a slow computer and I was moving up to dual monitors! I had found an incredible deal online and I thought it only fair to let my Twitter followers know ... in other words, I logged on to brag about it. To my surprise, within five minutes, I had received a tweet from the store, asking if everything worked correctly and if I needed help with anything. I will definitely be ordering from that store again.

Xuron Corporation, manufacturer of ergonomic, high-quality cutting tools and pliers, began using Twitter in May of 2009 to reach out to their hobby-oriented audience. Their goal was to connect with consumers – not to sell to them – but to connect on a personal level. To create interest and engage followers, Xuron has done product give-away promotions and found them to be very successful, and even fun! They use Twitter to drive traffic to their company Web site and to the Web sites of other companies and industry events (such as iHobby, NMRA and IPMS).

Abby Robey, Xuron's Director of Marketing:

I would love to see more hobby industry manufacturers, distributors and retailers getting involved. A small group of us are already there but we need more participation. Twitter is FREE!! It costs nothing to create an account and you don't need to spend a lot of time on it. However, I do believe it's important to view it as a commitment – take a few minutes every day to post something relevant and interesting to those you expect to follow you. Engage in dialogue occasionally so people see that you are interested. You will get out of it what you put in.

At this point, I now consider Twitter an important part of Xuron's overall marketing program.

So, there you have it ... two tools used successfully to promote retail sales, with time being your only expense. Facebook and Twitter are both easy to master, and although they can eat up huge chunks of your time, with a little forethought and planning, a solid presence on both sites can take less than ½ hour per day.

How to Get Started

Sign up for [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

1. Begin with setting up a profile. Take a few minutes to fill out your basic information. Add only the personal information that you're comfortable with sharing with the whole wide world.
2. Upload a photo.
3. Post a status message. Something as simple as "Setting up my (Facebook or twitter) account" is enough to get started ... as long as you remember to change it!
4. Find a friend ... or 20.

Create a Facebook business page.

1. You'll need photos, your logo, and text about your business.
2. Set your operating hours, types of payments you accept, etc.
3. Before you publish, strategize. Will you post once per week? Are you the sole person in charge of the page or will it be a team effort? What type of content will your audience find interesting? Videos? Action pictures? Notice of sales and promotions? Customer reviews?

Promote your Facebook business page and Twitter profile.

1. Help your current customers connect with you online. Use in-store posters, your newsletter, fliers, and even advertisements.
2. Add links to your Twitter and Facebook profiles to your email signature.
3. Add social widgets to your store's Web site. Both Twitter and Facebook offer easy-to-implement applications that encourage participation from your site's visitors.

Zero To Sixty Marketing LLC improves online performance for small businesses within their local and national audiences. Contact ZeroToSixtyMarketing.com to learn more about SEO services and business marketing strategies that bring paying customers to you.