

# Social Media - getting started

## How can you get started?

### Step One: Do your homework

With hundreds of social media channels out there to choose from already and with new ones emerging all the time, it simply isn't possible to cover them all.

The first step is therefore locating your target audiences and understanding which channels are most relevant to you. This is likely to include popular mainstream channels such as Facebook and Twitter as well as more niche channels such as specialist websites and blogs. For example, if you operate a hotel then you should incorporate TripAdvisor and encourage your guests to post reviews.

**Tip: For a categorised list of social media sites visit <http://traffikd.com/social-media-websites/>**

**Extra Tip: Get up to speed by watching 'Twitter Search in Plain English'.**

### Step Two: Don't just jump in

The next step is to explore how these channels work and tune in to the conversations – not only will you benefit from insights, this will also help you understand the tone and style of social media.

It is important to understand the etiquette of social media – every social media channel has its own set of rules, established and enforced by their users for their users. Breaking these rules could result in you looking naïve or foolish. Generally speaking, it is important to be honest and transparent about who you represent, avoid abusing the system and remember that it is a system built around reciprocity.

**Tip: With so many conversations taking place it's a good idea to get a system in place. Services like [Google Reader](#) will help you keep track of your favourite blogs and websites. Setting up a [Netvibes](#) page can make it easier to keep track of what people are saying about your company or business issues.**

### Step Three: Create your social profiles

Now you're ready to establish your own presence and engage in the conversations. The way in which you connect with your customers will be dependent on the nature of the channel - as well as setting up basic profiles, each channel might have additional features which provide you with more ways to interact...

#### Build a Facebook Fan Page

One of the quickest and easiest ways of reaching out to your customers and building a community is to set up a Facebook Fan Page. You can use this to keep your customers updated and promote discussions or special events. It can also be customised with a number of other features, such as Google map directions or coupons, to help attract fans and encourage them to interact more with your business.

**Tip: Check out [Sage's Facebook fan page](#).**

#### Set up a profile of your business on LinkedIn

If you sell services to businesses rather than consumers, then LinkedIn could be a useful platform for building relationships with your customers. By setting up a profile of you and your business, sharing insight with relevant groups and uploading presentations, you can connect with business partners and prospects and demonstrate your expertise.

**Tip: Join the [Social Media Marketing group](#) for more insights or [Sage UK's Train your business brain](#)**

#### Get Tweeting!

Setting up a Twitter profile is a great way to get started as you can 'follow' people in your industry, listen to real time conversations and connect with your customers. By contributing relevant information to the conversation you can add personality to your company and attract a stronger following.

**Tip: Search for your company or related business issues on [Twitter](#). You'll learn a lot about what people are saying about you and discover who to start following.**

## Explore local search services

Services like Qype can also be extremely powerful for local businesses such as shops and restaurants. Such services allow businesses to provide information such as phone numbers or opening hours and encourage user feedback to provide 'social proof' of your services.

**Tip: If you see a positive review of your business, then Tweet about it!**

## Create your own channel

It is also important to incorporate your own website into a social media strategy and tie it together with all of your social profiles. By creating your own blog, using a web service like Blogger or WordPress, you can start conversations with visitors on your website and keep them engaged with insights or guidance. If you don't have the time to create your own blog, then you can turn your website into a social hub by introducing your social profiles and providing the relevant links.

**Tip: Remember to include links back to your site, but don't over do it or people will think you're spamming.**

## Step Four: Managing your reputation

By tuning in to all the relevant conversations, you can dramatically improve your chances of finding unhappy customers quickly and addressing their issues before they do serious damage to your brand.

If you see a negative comment or review it is important to give these special attention and avoid hasty responses that you might regret later. It is easy to feel angry or upset by negative feedback, but by responding in a gracious and courteous manner, you can prevent issues from escalating further and might even end up with a more satisfied and loyal customer. Never mislead your audiences by posting false reviews that praise your business or put down your competitors. Social media can be extremely unforgiving if you're caught out.

**Tip: By setting Google Alerts and TweetBeep, you can track where your business or products are being discussed and reviewed.**

## Step Five: Use your CRM to build on these customer relations

Of course, capturing all the valuable information that social media reveals and making sure it translates into tangible business benefits can be a time consuming process. This is a key message we've been hearing from our small business customers and this is why we've added new social media integration to our small business customer relationship management (CRM) software.

What is CRM? This is the processes a company uses to track and organise its contacts with its current and prospective customers, manage prospect leads and improve customer retention - businesses large and small use CRM software to make these processes more effective and help build and maintain better customer relations.

ACT! by Sage is small business CRM, or contact management software. It keeps all the details of your customer relationships - phone numbers, emails, conversation notes, meeting and activity history, documents, social media profiles, and more - in one organised place, to make sure you never miss an opportunity.

CRM software, such as ACT! by Sage 2010, realises the important role that social media can play in connecting with your customers. To help you make the most of this information, you can integrate your CRM software with social media sites to build a richer picture of your customers and prospects. By integrating social media with your CRM software you'll be able to develop long-lasting, profitable relationships so existing customers keep coming back and new customer referrals keep coming in.

Just think how much more targeted your marketing would be if you knew:

- What social networking websites your customers visiting?
- What topics are important to them?
- How they get that information?
- Who else are they talking to?
- What are they saying about your products and services?

**Tip: Integrate what you learn about your customers with your CRM software, that way you'll convert your time spent on social media into revenue for your business.**