

# Social climbing for SMEs

MOST OF US HAVE SOME FORM OF SOCIAL MEDIA PRESENCE BUT ARE UNSURE OF HOW TO USE IT TO ITS FULL POTENTIAL. **MICHAEL KAVA** LOOKS AT HOW TO USE THESE TOOLS TO BUILD YOUR BUSINESS.

**T**here isn't a day that goes by that we don't hear the term 'social media' being used, either by the water cooler, in the newspaper, on the radio, on TV, in magazines or online.

Whether it's seminars we go to and listen to 'social media' experts telling us to get 'social', or it's the newspaper you pick up telling you to do the same, small businesses are being inundated with social media commentary, either offering advice or general chatter.

The truth is, social media isn't rocket science.

Whether it's Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or YouTube, all of these 'Generation Y'-driven phenomena are all just another vehicle by which we are able to communicate our business' philosophy, and our lives for that matter, to the outside world.

Each medium has its own way of addressing their audience. And like radio, websites, newspaper ads, flyers, workshops, events, they are all a tool for communication. The uniqueness that social media brings to a technologically savvy society is the way we can communicate with it. Social media tends to be more informal. It generally creates a dialogue with members and quite often can generate discussion.

I have advised some of my clients to use various elements of social media, and others not to. My belief is that social media creates an opportunity to keep in contact with your clients, current and prospective; keep people up to date with every minute of their business day, news, toilet breaks... you name it.

So the question is, how much of your business do people want to know? How much contact is too much, and



how much is not enough? I can't tell you what the right answer is for your business because I'm not one to give blanket suggestions or advice, but these questions are ones you need to ask yourself if you are going spend resources on using social media as a communication tool for your business.

Unsurprisingly, it's the similar line of questioning you should be considering for any other medium of communicating your brand.

Working as long as I have in the industry, I believe that not all social media platforms work for all types of small businesses and some work better than others depending on your industry. A professional can advise you on the right direction and which platform will work best for you and your business. Things that need to be considered are who your audience is and if they are they social media savvy also. If your target market is older, social media is likely not to be as effective. If you are a small business with a young clientele it is safe to say social media will be very effective for you, if executed properly.

When social media is the right fit for your business, some of the things that social media can be great for are updates on new products, new brands, new recruits, events, photos, videos, client wins, opinions, debates, blogs, forums, discussions and general exposure.

Certainly, get onboard the 'social

media' train to Graceland. Create a profile, but don't be overwhelmed by the endless possibilities, just get in there and get involved if you think it's relevant to your business, just like other potential channels of contact with our potential and current clientele that is out there in our wonderful wonderland of communication tools.

Today there are many online forums that are platforms for communication. For example, if you join a website based around your industry there are a number of opportunities for you to post questions and answer other peoples' questions. This works well because it creates a new opportunity to generate business by showcasing your brand and knowledge of your industry in a subtle way.

LinkedIn and Facebook are other great examples of how you can promote your business. By creating a company profile you cannot only advertise your brand and its services but post relevant information, create discussion boards, advertise available jobs and much more.

These forums can also run competitions on the social media sites encouraging people to share or re-tweet content or simply post questions that require a response from your followers.

There is no doubt that social media has become an essential marketing tool to help increase exposure for many businesses around the world including many small businesses.

But social media requires constant interaction and can be a full time job on its own. If you are a small business it is a good idea to have an internal communications employee or, if funds aren't equipped to handle another full time employee, a marketing company can be hired to do the work for you.

Social media is important, yes. Should it be ignored? No. As a small business you have the advantage of having a more targeted approach and a more defined audience, so use this to your advantage and start communicating in this new era now. **CH**