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Social media essential for business

A recent social media report by Sensis revealed that just 14 percent of small businesses, 25 percent of medium-sized businesses and 50 percent of large businesses have a social media presence. Today, [online marketing](#) is an essential part of a business marketing plan and social media is one aspect of successful online marketing.

For small businesses, [social media can provide many benefits](#) if planned and implemented with strategic thought. Here are four:

Wider Audience Exposure

Social media has gone mainstream. There are millions of people using it representing an enormous pool of people that can be tapped into. It is, however, not a matter of jumping in and utilising every platform available. Individual businesses need to research where their target audience is residing and where potential can come from. This may cost more time and money initially but a targeted campaign will be advantageous in the long run. By directly utilising the platforms of your target market your audience exposure is aimed specifically at your business needs.

Build Relationships

Businesses can't build relationships with their customers if they don't know what their customers care about, are interested in and what they are saying. Monitoring online chatter can be time consuming, however, costs are minimised if research has been undertaken. By engaging with consumers businesses can initiate discussion about their products, share information and build confidence in their business. As consumers interact with you they see a different aspect of the business. This interaction can build trust with current customers as well as potential ones. In a globalised economy, these relationships are important and can drive customer loyalty.

Successful Branding

It doesn't matter whether or not all users are directly engaged with your brand. By being proactive, the more times consumers see your brand the more likely they are to remember it. Brand awareness is essential for sustained success and if you have a group of loyal followers who believe in your business they can successfully tap into their networks and spread the word. They can also counteract the negative comments that will eventually occur.

Risk Management Strategy

One of the most important reasons [every business should be engaged](#) in social media is to protect their reputation. This may not appear like a benefit, however, being online allows every business to have a proactive risk management strategy. Negative comments will occur with or without you being online. By being online and involved in the conversation you can hopefully minimise the damage. If a customer makes comments that are untrue you are able to quickly correct them if you are monitoring the conversation.

When you are not there, no one can dispute these negative comments. In the majority of PR disasters that have arisen through social media, the fiasco has occurred because business has failed to adequately deal with a customer grievance or failed to respond to a negative comment online. Being part of the social media landscape is now a necessity for business to protect their brand identity.

Social media is all about engagement and relationships. With customers now having a public outlet to express opinions, the dynamic between consumers and business is shifting. Valuable information is available via social media presenting small business with a wonderful opportunity to listen, learn and engage with customers. Businesses that choose not to connect will be left behind.

[Anna Cairo](#) is an online copywriter and social media specialist helping small business gain online exposure. She combines her online communication experience with her Master's degree which focused on media and communication of the online environment.

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