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Facebook is an opportunity to connect with your customers and community in a unique way

August 18, 2011 - Connecticut

Social media is bringing us together. The world is smaller and our connections to one another are increasingly direct. It is more difficult to hide behind a corporate façade and project an image that's somehow both more and less than human. And this is great news for great companies!

If you're not on Facebook you're missing a wonderful opportunity to connect with your customers and community in a unique way. So if you haven't made the leap, here's the basics:

To get started, you'll need to create your own personal page, and from there you can create your company page. It's easy to do, and there are lots of people to help you if you're looking for guidance. You'll want to get your logo uploaded and decide on your security settings.

You'll also need to choose administrators for your page. These folks should be posting regularly. The more people you have posting the more opportunities you have to get the word out. Just make sure you're all clear on the rules of engagement. And administrators can post as the page which will show the post with your logo, or as themselves, which then will show their profile picture. Use your company persona for official notices and the like, but let the real personalities of your company show through on other posts. We like dealing with people, especially on Facebook. So don't hide behind your logo - show us your face!

It's often confusing to professionals first using Facebook choosing who to friend. A facebook friend can be anyone you want to be connected with that wants to be connected with you. Think of your posts as postcards, which can be read by anyone and put up on the refrigerator. They aren't letters, either in length or in confidence. If you wouldn't say it at the Chamber breakfast, then you probably don't want to post it on Facebook.

Here are five simple rules to keep in mind when you are posting to your company page.

Keep it real. Social media is different than other media. It's much more personal, which can be scary if you're used to hiding behind the corporate mask. The good news for good people and good companies is that social media is a way for you to shine in a way that others can't. Concerned that too much sharing and honesty will be a turnoff? To be sure you run the risk of alienating someone any time you take a stand, but my experience has been that I've gotten more clients by being up front and real about who I am, than I ever did by trying to be the right fit for everyone.

Entertain us. One of the things I love about Facebook is that I can catch up with friends and hear about what's going on in organizations I love at any time of the day or night - like at 3 a.m. in a bout of insomnia, or Saturday morning over coffee. The posts I love the most are both personal and funny. They are gifts for which I'm grateful. Be the company that makes your customers smile!

Educate us. My second favorite posts are those that inspire or tell me something new. You're the expert on your industry, your products and services. Inquiring minds want to know. Feed us information we want and help us solve problems and we'll be back.

Keep it positive. This isn't to say you can't post dire warnings, or give the straight poop when it's called for, but on balance, as in life, strive to be upbeat. Not many people want to hang with Debby Downer, in life or on line, so stay positive - be happy. Like your mother used to say ... if you don't have anything nice to post, don't post anything at all.

Don't post just to post. Don't buy into the idea that to be heard you need to post several times a day. If you post just to post you will quickly be ignored, defriended, or unliked. It's annoying and looks like a case of overblown self-importance (trust me, no one wants to know what you had for breakfast) or an obvious attempt to post at all costs. Post when you have something relevant to say.

Good luck... hope to see you on line!

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