

Twitter? Facebook? LinkedIn?

Using Social Media to Grow Your Practice

By Ali Maloy

The Internet. The World Wide Web. Cyberspace. The advent of the Internet age has truly opened doors for small business owners like us. It used to be that unless you had a decent marketing budget to work with, it was very difficult to find new clients.



Sure, word-of-mouth marketing still existed and worked just as well as it works today – but it was much, much slower. It wasn't something you could rely on to build your business.

Before the Internet, it was all about the Yellow Pages, newspaper ads, television commercials, billboard advertising, church bulletins, direct mail, street presence (location, location, location!) and cold calling. Yuck (especially that last one). I'm not saying that those forms of advertising don't work. They do, but they all cost a lot of money. You can't just place a newspaper ad once and expect to get clients. Traditional print advertising requires repetition – you have to keep placing ads week after week before you'll start to get any potential leads from it.

Actually, the majority of successful marketing efforts have an element of repetition. Why? Repetition builds familiarity with the audience. If you get a mailer every month from the same painting company, over time you'll start to feel like you know – and trust – that painting company. You may not know a single person that has ever used that painting company, but you just might be more likely to call that company over the others listed in the Yellow Pages when it comes time to repaint your living room.

Building an online presence also requires repetition, but there's one big difference between marketing your business online and marketing your business the old-fashioned way: the former is free, while the latter will likely cost you a pretty penny.

Don't be scared about the prospect of marketing your business online. It's really not as hard or time-consuming as you think. You'll have to put in some time upfront to get things up and rolling, but once you've got a system into place, you just have to keep the wheels rolling.

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Here's how to get started:

- Create a simple, professional-looking website for your business.
- Create a Facebook page for your business.
- Invite all of your Facebook friends to “Like” the Facebook page for your business by posting something like this when you send the invitation:

“My accounting and tax business, [insert name of your business here], now has a presence here on Facebook! I’ll be sharing weekly accounting and tax tips to help both small businesses and individuals. Be sure to “Like” my business page so you can benefit from these free tips!”

- Every week, post a free tip on your Facebook business page as promised. It shouldn’t be anything too complicated, (remember, your audience is made up on non-accountants – you want them to hire you to help them out with their accounting and tax needs), but it should provide value to them. An example:

“The IRS has published the standard mileage rates for 2013: 56.5 cents per mile for business miles driven; 24 cents per mile for medical or moving purposes; and 14 cents per mile in service for charitable organizations. Are you eligible to take a deduction for miles driven on your business or personal tax return? Call or email me if you are unsure – I can help you figure it out!”

- By posting a free weekly tip on your Facebook business page, you’ll be helping your network keep you top of mind for their accounting and tax needs, whenever those needs should arise.
- To increase your fans for your Facebook business page – essentially, to reach others that might be interested in your services – you can do a few different things:
- Ask your Facebook friends to invite their friends to “Like” your business’ Facebook page.
- For \$5 a pop, purchase some gigs at Fiverr.com to get other people to invite their Facebook friends to “Like” your Facebook business page.
- Purchase some advertising on Facebook specifically directed at your target audience. I realize this isn’t free (and neither are the Fiverr gigs mentioned above), but your money is much better spent on targeted marketing like this than on mailers and newspaper ads that end up going to people that aren’t in the market for your services. Plus, you can limit how much you spend. You can target based on location, interests, and more. You can specifically target small business owners in Kansas City – pretty precise, if you ask me! To find out more about how to create a Facebook advertisement, search for “Creating an Ad” in the Facebook Help Center.
- Publish the same (or different, if you like) free weekly tips on your Linked In profile.
- Spend some time each week or month searching for new Facebook friends and Linked In connections to add to your network.

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NOTE: When you add new Facebook friends, be sure to invite them to “Like” your Facebook business page. The best way to do this is to send them a personal message once they have accepted your Friend request. Tell them:

- What you’ve been up to since you last talked to them.
- Comment on something you read or saw on their Facebook profile.
- Ask them what is going on in their own life.
- When that person responds to your message, THEN in a follow-up message to them, mention your business and the existence of the Facebook page for your business. It’s very important to show interest in them before you ask them to “Like” your business page. Remember, marketing is all about focusing on relationships.

This is really just a starting point. The sky’s the limit when it comes to the possibilities of how to effectively market your accounting business online – and the best part about building an online presence is that it can cost as much or as little as you are willing to spend.

How are you going to connect with your future clients?



About the Author

Ali started Maloy Accounting in June 2006, and it has afforded her the opportunity to work with many different small businesses. She loves helping small businesses succeed by taking the “accounting burden” off their plates so they can focus more of their time on their core businesses. She provides accounting, forecasting, analysis, and tax functions for businesses in a wide variety of industries.

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