

The background of the slide is a blurred photograph of a crowd of people walking through a modern office hallway. The image is heavily motion-blurred, giving a sense of activity and movement. The color palette is dominated by cool blues and greys, with some warmer tones from the people's clothing. The lighting is bright, suggesting a well-lit indoor space.

Getting Social with Your Customers

How to Use Facebook to Connect with Your Customers

THE CONSUMER SHIFT FROM CLOSED DOORS TO OPENLY SOCIAL

With the amazing growth of both the access and use of the Internet, new shifts have risen from the ashes of traditional consumer behavior that affect how businesses communicate their value to their customers. No other shift has been more incredible in its impact than the rise of social media and the pressure it has placed on organizations that once kept everything “behind closed doors” to open up themselves up to the digitally social world.

With this shift towards being open and social organizations, came tools to convert the conversations from physical to digital, what we call today as “social media.” One of the most prominent tools, quite possibly known as the golden child of social media, is Facebook, which has amassed over 400 million active users worldwide and is still growing. But, like any new technology, businesses are still faltering and debating on how to use such a tool to move into this new social shift of connecting and collaborating directly with their customers.

While we do not claim to have the single answer to this predicament, this guide does aim to give you a few concepts of how to use Facebook to reach out and connect to your customers using capabilities built into the tool itself.

YOUR PERSONAL PROFILE PAGE ON FACEBOOK

The first and most important tool within the Facebook system that can help you connect to your customers is your personal Facebook profile. This should be where you dedicate your initial focus as it is your key to using all other Facebook services. In fact, you cannot even participate in any other aspect of Facebook without this profile. So, if you do not have one already, it's time to get one setup!

To create your account, simply go to: <http://www.facebook.com> and fill out the short form on the home page. Once your profile has been activated, you can follow Facebook's own setup guide available by [clicking here](#).

Before You Get Started

One thing you will need to decide before creating a new or editing your current profile is to make the decision whether or not you will use your profile for professional purposes, personal purposes, or both. If you already have a profile, you may have been using it for personal purposes, meaning up to this point all of your information, posts, and connections were designed to be shared amongst friends and family and may include items not suitable to share with your customers.

So, when it comes to using a Facebook profile for professional purposes, you need to understand and realize that what is posted on your profile will be visible to all those that connect to you, in this case, your customers. Our recommendation would be to create a separate professional profile with your work email address that can be used for the express purposes of connecting with your customers, partners, employees, and industry networks.

Using Your Profile to Connect with Customers

Once you have completely setup your new professional profile, you can begin to take advantage of certain areas of your page that will help you connect and engage your customers. There are five areas that we will address here to give you concepts on how you can use your profile to accomplish this.

1. The Wall Tab

Your wall is essentially an open message board where you can share anything from news updates, product announcements, special promotions, photos from recent events, videos of your services in action, or even links to other resources on your website. This will allow your customers to learn more about what is going on within your business and any new, exciting things that you may be working on or releasing soon. This tab alone has a powerful effect of making customers feel closer and more engaged in your business, thus strengthening their loyalty and your relationship.

2. The Info Tab

Your info tab represents a quick snapshot of who you are including a few things about you, your hobbies, your interests, and your employer (which is the reason you want them to connect!) Through this tab, your connected customers can identify commonality that could help them engage you on a deeper level, PLUS with the links to your website, it becomes a traffic driver. Information from this tab will be used by Facebook in the "Suggested Connections" tools and well as their "People Search" tool, so be sure to fill it out.

3. The Photos Tab

Your photos tab is designed to be a gallery of photos that are categorized by you and displayed in a slideshow. Using this tab, you can highlight photos of new upcoming products to excite your customers, you can introduce new team members to give a more personal feel, you can highlight new changes within your stores that might interest customers, and you can show off the success of your last event that they may not have attended. Think of photos as the perfect way to show anything in your business that is better communicated visually rather than written into a boring press release.

4. The Events Tab

Your events tab lists all of the events that you have posted as the hosting organization as well as any events that you are attending. This is a great way to promote your corporate events that are targeted to your customers. Do you have a special seminar coming up? Post it. Are you attending a tradeshow? Post it. Also, by posting events that you are attending, you may entice some of your customers to attend, which now gives you an opportunity to engage on a more personal level, face-to-face.

5. The Notes Tab

Your notes tab can be your most powerful way to share multiple pieces of information with your customers. With this tool, you have the ability to post informational and educational articles that can be passed around to your network. You can post your boring press releases or your exciting new product announcements. Even better, your notes tab has the ability to automatically import your blog feed, thus automatically presenting each post to your entire Facebook network!

FACEBOOK BUSINESS PAGE

If you have ever desired to have a “profile” for your organization, then Facebook’s Business Pages is what you are looking for. This tool is essentially an exact duplicate of your personal profile page setup, but is used completely to promote a business. With this page, you have access to the same tabs that your personal profile has (Wall, Info, News, Boxes, Events, Photos, Notes, etc.) with the main difference being that your customers are connecting and engaging you through your business page rather than through your personal profile.

The only other difference we find worth noting is that you now have two “walls.” One that you, the organization posts to and another where all of your customers can post information and responses too. This has the benefit of allowing your customers to engage you directly, but also each other, which can lead to some fantastic developments in terms of brand evangelism.

Imagine the feedback you could get from your customers when one of them shares how your product changed their life. Or the number of new attendees to your next seminar when a few of your past attendees post a positive review of how helpful it was! This is a great way to have your customers become a virtual marketing team!

To create a Facebook Business Page, simply go here: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/create.php>



FACEBOOK GROUP PAGES

Sometimes, you may find that all you are looking for is a way to engage a small subset of your customers. Maybe you've decided to perform some market research or hold focus groups and want to find a cheaper way to identify and engage a few customers that doesn't require renting a space, transporting individuals to a location, and feeding them mounds of food while trying to find out what they think about your new widget.

Something that might work for you is a Facebook Group. Unlike a business page, the group functionality allows you to control who is able to connect and become a participant. While you still can post news and events, customers connected to your group will also be able to take part in a discussion forum that is available only to them and is moderated by you.

You can use this tool to host informal product feedback discussions, question your customers about how to improve customer service, or even solicit ideas from your customers of how to get your product into new geographical markets. Think of this tool as the best way to engage a small portion of your customer base on a deeper, more personal, and more exclusive way.

To Create a Facebook Group, simply go here: <http://www.facebook.com/groups/create.php>

A FEW WARNINGS BEFORE YOU BEGIN

It would be prudent of us at this point in time to warn you of a few things before you dive head first into using Facebook as your tool to connect to your customers. The whole premise behind social media is the fact that almost anyone and everyone can connect with each other, communicate with each other, and share all sorts of media with each other. The only way that it works for your business is to be sure that you are the leader in all this connecting!

In other words, remember that this is a community of individuals that can either become your best brand evangelists or your worst PR nightmare!

People who connect to you want to hear from you. They want to know that you care about them and what they think about you, so be sure that you are the one who is doing the most engaging and that you are listening to everything your customers post.

Why is this so important?

Imagine if you had a customer who was upset that the product you sold them did not live up to what it claimed. They then found you on Facebook and decided to alert you to this gripe. If you were not consistently listening to your Facebook community, that customer could turn from one to hundreds who feel exactly the same way. Now your wonderful tool for engaging your customers has become the primary place of negative publicity! How would your marketing and PR department like to deal with that?

So listen to your community! Doing so can make all the difference in the future growth of your business!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FROM US

» **Attend one of our Social Media workshops!**

» **Read our blog articles about Social Media**

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FROM OUR FAVORITE PROVIDERS

» **7 Amazing Ways to Promote Your Business on Facebook - from our friends at StartupNation.com**

» **Successfull B2B Companies Will Be About Platforms Not Products - from SocialMediaB2B.com**

» **What it Takes to Lead a Social Media Program - by Scott Hepburn of the Media Emerging blog**

To your success!



About the Authors

Brian Hamlett is the Founder and President of mPower Consulting, a strategic marketing firm who's aim is to "make the web easy" for businesses and organizations. Their emphasis on educating clients in the tools and techniques has laid the foundation for successful growth at over 30 organizations from innovative start-ups to 10 year old family businesses to top Fortune 5000 businesses.

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