

GUIDE

Make Your First Sale on Social Media

A guide for small and medium-sized businesses



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Social Selling: The use of social media to identify and engage prospects and customers at the right time in order to build better relationships.

Your customers are more sophisticated, more knowledgeable, and more socially connected than they were even a few years ago. They have access to vast amounts of information, and can rely on huge peer networks for advice and expertise.

As a result, the buying process has significantly changed. With so much information available, buyers aren't interested in returning your cold calls—in fact, cold outreach is ineffective 97 percent of the time.¹ Instead, buyers are doing their own research, and are increasingly looking to social networks for that information. For example, 86 percent of B2B IT buyers use social media to find information during their decision-making process.²

Social selling capitalizes on this new relationship between the buyer and company by creating an ongoing dialogue on social media. When businesses use social selling strategies, they can:

- Reach buyers earlier and increase the chance of closing a sale
- Stay connected to customers between purchases
- Improve brand awareness and boost customer retention



Why Social Selling Works for Your Business

Selling on social media is a long-term, non-interruptive process that focuses on relationship building and customer retention. While this may take longer than a one-off sales pitch or cold call, SMBs that invest in social selling are experiencing a big return.

As research from LinkedIn shows, 81 percent of SMBs use social media to drive business growth, and 82 percent of hyper-growth SMBs say that social media is effective for getting new leads.³

A study conducted by Twitter states that 60 percent of respondents say they've made a purchase from an SMB based on something they saw on Twitter and 86 percent say they plan to make a purchase in the future.⁴

And, as Hubspot points out, 3 in 5 SMBs say they've gained new customers by using social media.⁵

If you haven't considered using social media as a sales strategy, it's time to start. This guide will give you a primer for how to use social media to increase sales and will offer quick tips and tricks on how to incorporate social selling into your sales and marketing strategies.

The term “social selling” can be misleading. It isn't about blasting your sales pitch on social, it's about developing long-term relationships that lead to repeat business and steady sales.



How to Increase Sales with Social Selling

We've outlined five easy steps to improve your customer engagement and encourage repeat sales.

- 1. Be yourself on social media**
- 2. Spend time on the right networks**
- 3. Listen to and learn from your community**
- 4. Provide great customer service**
- 5. Create, find, and share relevant content**



Be yourself on social media

Having a unique brand persona on social media is an excellent way to increase brand awareness and positive brand sentiment. Studies have shown that once people learn more about a business's unique traits, they feel closer to the brand. For example, 73 percent of respondents in a Twitter study say they feel more positive about an SMB after they follow their business and read their Tweets.⁶

Generating positive brand sentiment absolutely impacts your sales: a study by Deloitte UK shows that a 30 percent increase in positive Tweets translated into four times as many sales.⁷

When you're creating a brand persona on social media, consider the following:

- **Your brand's social media profile:** As KISSMetrics usefully points out, you should think of your brand's social media profile as a landing page.⁸ It may be the first time that someone is going to encounter your business, so you need to make a great first impression. Get your audience curious and excited about what you do.
- **Your target audience:** While you want to have fun on social media, you should also make sure that your posts are reflective of, and targeted towards, the niche audience you hope to reach. Provide information that drives your relationships forward.
- **Your tone and style:** The tone and style of your posts should reflect your brand personality. It's important that you develop a system or adopt a process that allows you to keep all shared content and posts consistent with your branding.



Get started with Hootsuite University's free course:
Optimizing Your Social Media Profiles.



Spend time on the right networks

Your brand's social presence should correspond to where your target customers hang out. If you know that your target audience primarily uses Twitter and LinkedIn, for example, then that's where you should be spending the most time. This will allow you to focus your efforts and build connections in the right places.

Within each of your chosen social networks, your team should also join niche communities and engage in conversations regularly. Remember that you don't want to come off as irritating or spammy, so make sure you keep sales chat off discussion forums. Focus on providing value and expert advice.

Here are some ways to improve your group discussions:

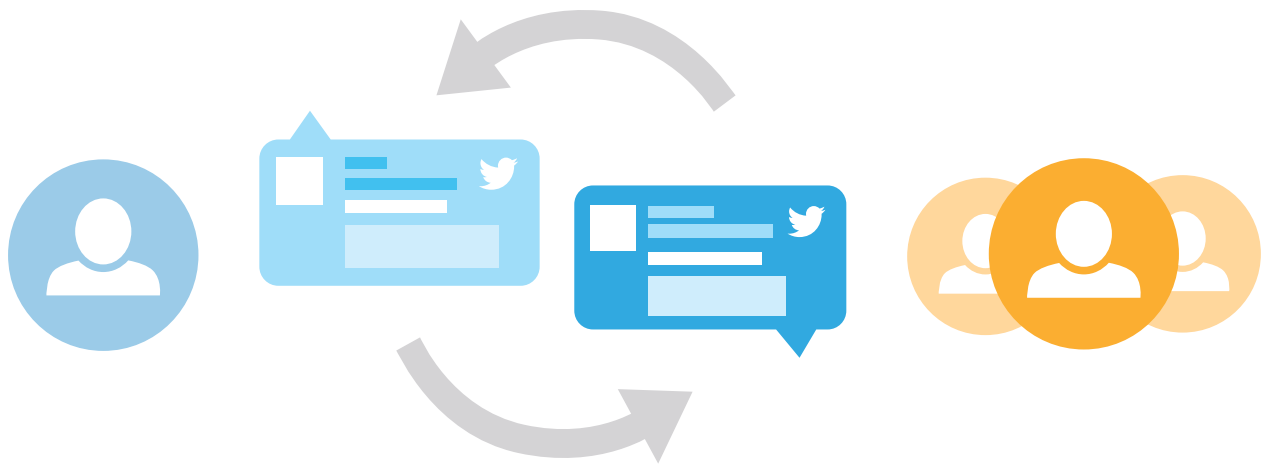
- **Engage regularly:** It's important for brand exposure to maintain a regular presence online. This will keep your company top of mind and will allow you to better answer questions related to your industry.
- **Ask team members to participate:** Identify experts on your team and let them showcase their expertise when talking to customers. It will make your outreach feel more personable and your company more approachable.
- **Do your research:** Before you respond to an article or discussion, do some research on the topic and contributors. Look for commonalities and ways you can provide a unique point of view. This will help make your arguments more credible.

“Before LinkedIn and other social networks, in the sales world, ABC stood for Always Be Closing. Now, ABC means Always Be Connecting, because your connections lead to your next lead and your next close.”

Jill Rowley, Social Selling Evangelist



You can quickly respond to discussions and assign messages to your team in Hootsuite. Here's how.



Listen to and learn from your community

Listening to your customers on social media helps you understand the real, unfiltered conversations happening around your brand. It gives your business an opportunity to jump in and respond in real time, provide resources, and answer customer questions.

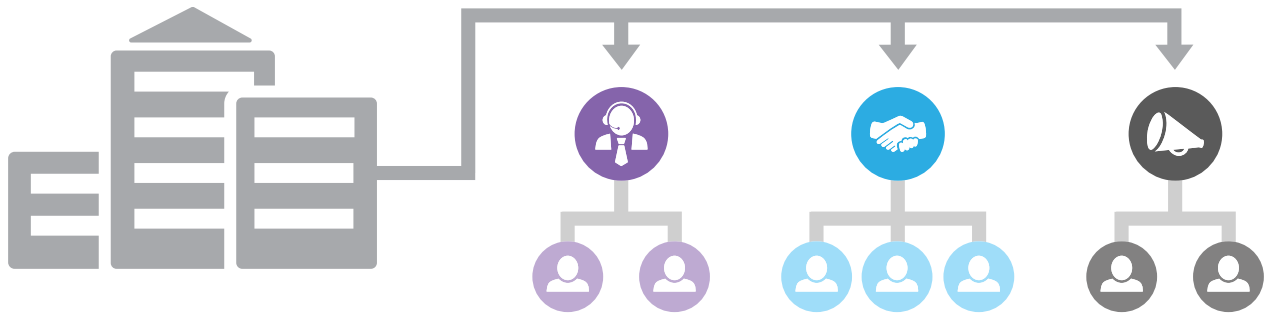
Keeping tabs on your industry and competitors also has big advantages. By knowing who your competitors are and what they're doing, your company can define strategies that will distinguish you from other similar products or services when you're talking to your customers.

When you're listening on social media, here's what you should watch out for:

- **Mentions of your brand and product:** This is one of the most straightforward ways to find and engage with your customers. If a customer mentions you on social media, there's a good chance they're looking for a response. It may be positive feedback or a complaint, but either way it's your job to figure out how to respond in a professional way. Keep in mind that fewer than 3% of customers directly @mention brands on Twitter, so you'll have to extend your social media monitoring beyond direct mentions.⁹
- **Keywords and topics related to your industry:** Just like any keyword monitoring, you're best off to stick to body and long tail keywords, which are more targeted and will yield better results.¹⁰ For example, if you own a coffee shop in downtown Portland, don't just monitor the word "coffee," try monitoring keywords slightly more specific to your brand like "coffee Portland," or phrases that your audience might be searching for, like "best coffee shop Portland." This will help you identify potential customers looking for your product or service.
- **Competitor names and keywords:** Monitor competitor names and related phrases on social media. Look at where your competitors are the most active and where their content gets the most traction. This will give you an indication of who their target market is and if there's any overlap with your own.
- **Expert tip:** If you're targeting customers in a specific area, use geo-targeting to monitor social conversations. For example, if you're that same coffee shop owner in Portland, target customers talking about coffee within five miles of your location.



You can monitor all of your social networks and conversations in Hootsuite. Here's how.



Provide great customer service

Providing a great customer experience is essential to successful social selling. When companies respond to customer service requests over social media, those customers end up spending 20 percent to 40 percent more with the company.¹¹ Customers that encounter positive social customer care experiences are nearly three times more likely to recommend a brand.¹²

The importance of good social customer service has not gone unnoticed by companies. The adoption of social customer care programs has increased fivefold from 12 percent in 2010 to 59 percent in 2013,¹³ and 67 percent of companies believe that social customer service is the most pressing short-term priority.¹⁴

In order to create a great customer experience, you should:

- **Be proactive:** If you need to alert your customers about a problem or issue with your product or service, do it. Don't be afraid to address problems on social media.
- **Keep tabs on customers:** Use tools like Twitter lists to group customers together and keep track of your relationship with them. Group your lists by relevant categories, for example, you could organize according to return customers, potential customers, brand advocates, and unhappy customers.
- **Respond quickly:** If you don't respond quickly to a customer question, they may look elsewhere (like a competitor) for information. For example, the expected response time on Twitter is about two hours.¹⁵
- **Address all complaints:** Over 289 million social media complaints go unanswered every year in the U.S., and this is a huge loss for companies.¹⁶ Make it a priority to turn negative experiences into positive ones: 42 percent of people will tell their friends about a good customer experience on social, while 53 percent will talk about a bad one.¹⁷



Learn how to deliver exceptional customer service using Hootsuite.



Create, find, and share relevant content

Creating and sharing relevant content increases brand credibility and trust. It also helps you build meaningful relationships with customers by providing them with useful information.

According to a recent DemandGen study, 82 percent of B2B buyers viewed five or more pieces of content during the decision-making process, and 61 percent stated that the winning vendor delivered a mix of useful content for each stage of this process.¹⁸ The lesson? It pays to share good content.

The right content will deliver the right message at the right time, so your content strategy needs to address your sales funnel at key stages in the buyer journey.

Below we've listed three basic buying stages with suggested content types:

- **Awareness:** Your content should be high-level and educational. Nothing will annoy your customer more than 'educational content' that is really just a thinly veiled advertisement for your product or services. Deliver on value to keep your audience coming back. Useful content types include blogs, curated articles, ebooks, guides, videos, and images.
- **Purchase:** Your content should make your customer feel good about their purchase and educate them on best practices to make them more successful. Useful content types include testimonials, follow-up emails, exclusive offers, blogs, ebooks, and guides.
- **Evaluation:** Your content should clearly outline what you offer and why you're different (i.e. your unique selling proposition). You should take an evaluative approach to help the buyer assess their needs and make comparisons. Useful content types include buyer guides, product or service reviews, videos, and images.

"You have to have targeted content that reflects a deep understanding of your audience and where they are on their way down the path to purchase."

[Kevin Cain, Content Marketing Expert](#)



Learn how to find and share content for social media in our guide, [Time Saving Tips for Social Media Managers](#).



Putting it all Together

Social selling opens up the dialogue between you and your customers at key stages during the buying process. This not only allows you to gain further insights about your company and industry, but also allows you to discover and nurture customers.

By identifying what social selling tactics will work within your marketing and sales strategies, you can enhance your existing processes and drive more revenue.

About Hootsuite

Hootsuite is the most widely used platform for managing social media, loved by over 10 million people around the globe. Hootsuite makes it easy to find new customers, nurture existing relationships, and grow your business.

Curious about how we can help?
Sign up for a free Hootsuite account and start selling on social today.

Endnotes

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