



is social media... THE BEST MONEY you'll NEVER spend!

Total Real-ness:

As a small business you have something the big guys can never have and that is 'Total real-ness.'

You understand your brand, your industry, your customer and your competition.

You know more about selling your product or service than anyone else. And this kind of domain expertise translates incredibly well on social media.

According to a recent study by Blue, 50 percent of small businesses report they have developed new leads from social media.

So 'social media' is working for small businesses. But what is it about small businesses that makes social media such a natural fit, and their success something the big guys strive to emulate?

Trust:

...Is built through Interaction

As a small business, you don't have automated phone systems with a menu of options, nor do you out-source any of your marketing to an individual or company that has never experienced your product, service or store.

Here's where you dominate: Through meaningful, personal, and real interaction. You're available to your customers and can serve them in a personal way big brands can't. Social media is the perfect extension to what you've already been doing.

Imagine the dynamics of handing a potential customer a proposal along

"The price is right, the only commitment is just the involvement of keeping up with the posting. I could probably do better at it, but their format and the way you post keeps changing and I'm not that sharp on keeping up with all their new stuff."

- Peter Beckers, Jr. / Cleaned by Pete

with a 'line-card' that talks about not only other services but the many reasons that they should consider your business over that of your competitors. And on that line-card it offers a place for them to actually see how you rank in your community with the services that you provide.

Embrace

Companies that don't embrace social media today are missing huge opportunities to capitalize on the consumers' voices. That's because consumers can contribute immediately and powerfully to a better service experience.

Social media has become an integral part of the consumer experience. Yet few small business fully embrace this new social reality—presumably because they're afraid of negative comments.

But small business that don't embrace this *free* social media are missing huge opportunities to capitalize on consumers' voices.

Members' voices are vital to their growth. Social media provides an incredible opportunity to engage those voices, to turn one customer's great experience into an advertisement that attracts new customers and gets current customers thinking positively about you. It's an incredibly advantageous way to address customer concerns and improve your company's service culture in real time.

Encourage:

Here are seven steps to encourage consumers to use social media in a way that will benefit your company:

1. Make it easy for consumers to go social. When communicating with members, include information about social review sites where members can share their experiences. This

shows confidence and can lead to great word-of-mouth publicity.

2. Say "thank you." It's a simple gesture that can go a long way.

3. Invite members to reach out. Acknowledge members' social networks during service delivery. It's a great way to capitalize immediately on member interactions.

4. Ask how you can improve. Be open to feedback and encourage members to bring their complaints directly to you so you can immediately begin the service recovery process. This allows you to turn a problem into an opportunity—and a casual member into a loyal one.

5. Encourage members to recognize great one-on-one service. Collect input about good employee-member experiences. This can boost morale, focus members on what employees are doing right, and give employees measurable feedback.

6. Funnel member questions through social media. Displaying responses to consumer questions openly online allows other members with the same problems to benefit. It also helps build up the businesses's informational capabilities, improving future interactions.

7. Encourage members to talk about your brand. The best way to ensure members are spreading positive, encouraging messages about your business is to provide such great service that they can't help but share their stories with others.

Engage:

Companies should be saying to their customers, 'If you did not enjoy our service, please tell us. If you did enjoy our service, please tell someone else. Engage them. Tell unhappy customers to come to you via social media so you can make it right and improve your overall service.'