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Why social media is important

Social media has exploded in recent years. We have now entered the age of the relationship. With the help of social media, marketing has evolved into a two-way dialogue, not just a monologue. By using social media as a way to advertise for your company, you can speak directly to the consumers in an arena they are comfortable with. Social media allows businesses to connect with their customers and prospects while shaping their perceptions of products and services.

Social media can be extremely powerful for business. But it can also be a big risk as well. Social media is not your super hero, and if your service is weak, your products are poor, and you do not respond quickly enough to those business failures, then your customers will use social media to enhance and vocalize those feelings for the world to see. Not being online does not take the problem away. Customers will still air their issues online, you just need to make sure that you are also online, and implementing a listening strategy so you can nip any grievances in the bud quickly and efficiently before the problem escalates.



People will talk about you and your business, whether you are on social media platforms or not.



Set up a listening strategy for your company name.

So, we start this book with setting up an effective listening strategy for your company and your personal name and the rest of the book covers creating an active presence online.

Set up an effective listening strategy

Google Alerts is not the same as it used to be, and it is likely that it will eventually be another tool that Google will terminate, in a similar way that they switched off so many excellent Google products such as Google Reader etc. In addition, Google Alerts only sends you email if new articles, web pages or blog posts make it into the top 10 Google News results, the top 20 Google Web Search results or top 10 Google Blog Search results for your query. If the top results remain the same for a while, you will not receive emails on your topic. For this reason, there's a great product called "Mention", which will monitor and listen to what is being said about you or your company online.



Google Alerts will soon be a thing of the past.

How to get started with Mention

Go to the homepage (www.mention.net) and click the **Sign up** button. You can sign up using your existing Facebook, Twitter, Google, or Open ID account, or just enter your name, email address, and a password to create a new account.

A screenshot of the "Create your free account" form on mention.net. The form has a dark grey header with the title and a "Close" button. On the left, there are input fields for "Full Name", "Email Address", "Password", and "Confirm Password". Below these is a link to the terms of use and privacy policy. A blue "Create your Free account" button is at the bottom left. On the right, there's a section titled "Do you already have an account on one of these sites?" with four options: "Sign up with Facebook", "Sign up with Twitter", "Sign up with your Google account", and "Sign up with your OpenID".

If you sign up using an existing account, you'll be asked to enter an email address. Then you can choose how to use Mention.

You can download Mention for Windows, get the app for iPhone or Android, install a Chrome extension (see page 10), or just use the web app.



Register with mention.net to perfect your listening strategy.

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What is a Google Chrome Extension?

Google Chrome extensions are like mini applications (similar to the apps that you would install on your smartphone). You can access software quickly and easily by simply clicking on the extensions from your Google Chrome bar.



Creating a new alert on Mention

 A screenshot of the 'Create your alert' form on the Mention website. The form is titled 'Create your alert' and includes the subtext 'You can mention any key-words related to you, your brand, your companies or your competitors. Set up your alert by following the steps.'

- EXPRESSION:** A text input field with the placeholder 'The name of your brand'.
- LANGUAGES:** A list of languages with checkboxes: French, English (checked), Spanish, German, Italian, Portuguese, Afrikaans, Swahili, and Amharic.
- Filter expressions:** Three sections for defining search filters:
 - 'At least one of the following expressions' with a text input and a dropdown arrow.
 - 'And all of the following expressions (in the same order)'. This section is currently empty.
 - 'And none of the following expressions' with a text input and a dropdown arrow.
- Footer:** A small disclaimer: 'You can mention any key-words related to you, your brand, your companies or your competitors. We do not include email addresses or phone numbers. But we will notify you about it.' Below this is a 'Show more languages' link.
- Submit:** A blue 'Next step' button at the bottom right.

...cont'd

Once you click through to the web app, you'll see a screen where you can create your alert.

Then just complete the form:

Name your alert: I suggest creating a Mention alert for your name, with a second one for your company name. In time, you may want to set up alerts for industry news, your competitors, your product names, etc.

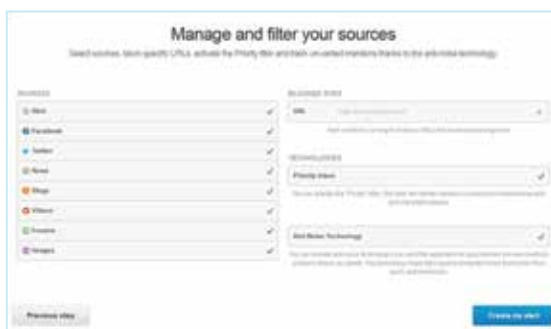
Include and exclude expressions: Type in the words or phrases that you want to get alerts for. You can include common misspellings or variations, and you can also exclude terms, i.e. tell Mention not to send you alerts for pages that include a given word or phrase. For example, there is a very active Twitterer who has the same name as mine, so I have excluded all of her Tweets from my summary email.

Choose your languages: English is the default, but you can choose to receive alerts in French, Spanish, German and many other languages too.

In the next step, you can manage and filter your sources. You could receive alerts from all sources (the web, Facebook, Twitter, news, blogs, videos, forums and images) but you can exclude some of those sources if you wish, or block a specific site.



Set up alerts for your competitors' names and industry news.



On this screen you can also choose whether you want to use “Priority inbox” (a feature that flags Mentions they identify as



Utilize the priority inbox feature.

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more important or influential) and “Anti-Noise Technology” (which removes Mentions similar to those you have deleted).

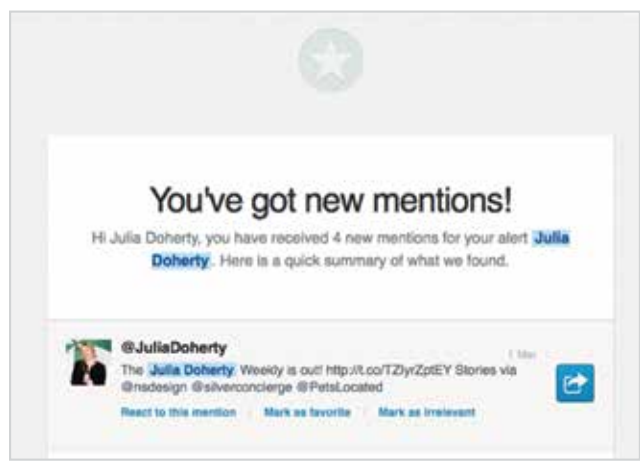
Then click **Create my alert**. At this point, you can choose to share your alert with other users. Anyone can then see the alerts, but you’ll be the owner with the ability to edit and manage settings, add or delete users as well as delete the alert.

Mention notifications

Google Alerts are bare-bones emails with links to the pages that mention the word or phrase you’re monitoring. They look at bit like this:



Mention also sends you an email when you have new results:



As you can see, the Mention email is much more user friendly and it also has more options: Click the blue button to go to the page, or click one of the links below the entry to react to the Mention, mark as a favorite or delete the Mention. Clicking any of these links opens up the Mention web app, which looks a lot like an email application, which most users are familiar with.

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In the far left column, you have a list of views. The default view is Mentions, which you can see in the next column over, with the most recent Mention at the top.

You can filter the Mentions column by source and toggle the view between all, unread, and priority. (The “priority” Mentions have red flags.)

On the right, in the main view, you get a preview of the page with your Mention. This is really cool because you can see the context of the Mention without having to actually visit the page – it’s obviously much more robust than the little search-style snippet you get in the Google Alert email. From this view you can choose to click through to the original URL or the source, and you can also “favorite” the Mention, block the source or trash it using the little icons at the top.

Is there a cost to Mention?

At the time of going to print, there is a basic free account for one user, one alert and to receive 100 Mentions a month, and various packages from a premium, business package to a full enterprise bespoke package. Visit <https://en.mention.net/pricing> to find the latest prices.



There is a free version of Mention, but you can pay to upgrade for additional features.

Four steps to online marketing success



Social media is not a numbers game.

It is interesting to see what people consider to be the steps to social media success. Some people just see the numbers. For example, they look at a Twitter account that has 20,000 followers, or they view a Facebook page that has thousands of likes and they assume that they are successful in their social media activities. This not quite true! Social media is successful if you are communicating and building relationships with your target market, which will ultimately convert into new business. There is no point in a kitchen designer from Northamptonshire, UK, having 3,000 likes on their Facebook page, if those likes are all from people in the USA.

Social media success will rarely happen overnight. When you break it down, there are really only four steps to achieve social media success online:



Review your platforms at least once every six weeks.

1

Build your platforms

The phrase from the *Field of Dreams* film with Kevin Costner, “If you build it, he will come” is so overused nowadays. But there is no getting away from the fact that if your platforms are not professionally designed, if you have an inactive or poorly designed website, or have not bothered to change your Twitter skin then this will have an effect on your overall strategy.

2

Grow your network

It is a well-known fact that if you do not have a network of people to talk to online, then you are really just talking to yourself! Have a strategy for growing your network online for each platform. Decide and define who your target market is and start to follow them. Use tools such as www.followerwonk.com to find people on Twitter. Check out LikeAlyzer (see page 120) or run some adverts on Facebook to see how to grow your audience.

The best results we have had was to run an email marketing campaign to tell people about our Company

LinkedIn page. Make sure that your strategy is ongoing and reviewed at least every six weeks. These tools will be covered in more detail later in the book, as well as giving you more inspirational ideas on how to build your following, connections and likes.

3 **Define a listening, engagement and content strategy**

This is probably the area where most businesses fail on online marketing. Their posts are all over the place, with no consistency. They fail to set up listening strategies to respond to people who are talking about them online (good and bad). Try **mention.net** (see pages 9-13) which has a free service to help you listen to your audience. The scattergun approach to producing content does not work.

Make sure that you are using a social media management system such as Hootsuite (www.hootsuite.com) or Tweetdeck (www.tweetdeck.com) and start planning what you are going to say and do. Decide on a blogging topic for the month and plan what you are going to write about, with set dates for publication.

But the most important strategy in Step 3 is the word “engagement”. Thank people for mentioning you in a Tweet, ask people questions, comment on others’ posts etc. You must talk to people in order to build those important relationships that lead to business and referrals.

4 **Measure the results**

As with any type of marketing, whether it is printing leaflets, your website activity, special offers etc., you need to measure the results, and social media activity is no different. If you don’t know what is working and what is not working then how do you know if it is successful?



Plan your content topics in advance. Write the topics down for each month and then gear your content posts around those topics.



Don't forget the word “social”. It is important to engage and talk to others online for a successful social media strategy.

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Remember Einstein's famous quote:

“Insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.”

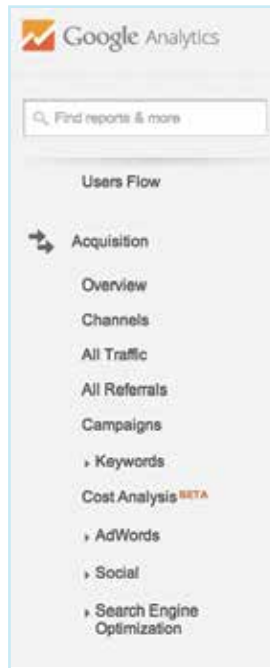
albert einstein

It makes good business sense to make sure that you are measuring your activities.

Each chapter of the book will end with a conclusion. For each platform we will declare how to achieve the four steps to social media success, including how to measure your success on each platform, in more specific detail.



Check your Google Analytics (see pages 258-260) to see how much traffic is being generated by your social media activities. You may be pleasantly surprised. Simply click **Acquisition**, then **Social** to view the results.



Set your social media goals

So many companies are “winging it” when it comes to social activity. The expressions “Social media ROI” has many names – for example, “return on investment”, “return on influence” to name a few, but do you really know what you are trying to achieve by having an effective social media strategy?

Where do you start and how do you relate what to measure online with your overall business goals?

We will discuss 10 reasons that businesses, small and large, are active online. Read through each goal and then choose just two of those goals before you indulge in the rest of this book. Once you decide where you are going, you will have a better vision of how you are going to get there.

Most people will answer the question “Why are you doing social media?” with “To get more sales”. Many of the reasons below will result in more sales. Therefore, this has been removed as a reason to be active online.

To drive traffic to your website

If the majority of your sales come from your website, then it is a no-brainer to have this goal as top of your list. Traffic to your website is important for all businesses, but especially important if you are selling your products or services online.

You can create an amazing website that looks stunning, and is extremely functional. However, without traffic to the site, you are going nowhere fast.

Using social media to drive traffic to your website is easy.

You can embed the link to your website in a Tweet.



Check out Chapter 5 for help with Twitter.



Setting your social media goals and objectives is the first stage to social media success.



Use a URL shortener (see pages 144-145) to gain statistics on how often a link has been clicked on from your social networking sites.

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In Chapter 4, we will talk through how to post a link to your website on Facebook, which is also a highly effective way to drive traffic back to your website. You can also use the Facebook applications or Facebook adverts to achieve similar results.



Posting updates into your LinkedIn status update to drive traffic back to your blog, products online or any part of your website. We'll cover this in Chapter 6.



There are many ways in which you can use social media to drive traffic back to your website. Always check that your website is visible in the “About us” areas of your online profiles or biographies online for additional opportunities.

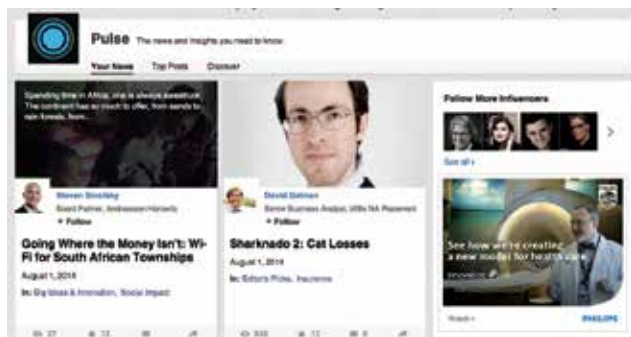
To appear as an expert in your field

Everybody trusts an expert. And, as every salesperson will tell you, individuals want to do business with people they know, like and trust.

The best way to brand yourself as an expert is by using a strategy that leverages social media. This includes LinkedIn, Twitter,

...cont'd

Facebook, YouTube and top of the pile is blogging. We will go into more detail in Chapter 3 on how you can appear as an expert in your field within each platform.



Did you know that you can now become a published author on LinkedIn and become a LinkedIn Influencer? What a fabulous way to appear as an expert in your field! All influencers can be found in the Pulse area of LinkedIn. (Explained in more detail within the LinkedIn chapter).

Brand awareness

There are many reasons that brand awareness may be top of your social media goals. You may be a fledgling company that is dipping its toes in the business world, or you may have been established for many years with a solid customer base, which is now looking to expand into different markets. Perhaps you have a new product to launch, or a new service to a niche market.

Reputation management

Social media helps a brand reach out to their customers and communicate with them, playing a significant role in online reputation management. 70% of people who look for reviews online trust posts by friends and family, while 90% trust reviews from other consumers. From a business-to-business point of view, 42% of people look up the people that they are going to do business with and 45% of people learnt something from searching online which changed their minds. (Source: <http://likedyou.com/category/social/>) What better place to be constantly looking for reviews than social media?

Surveys (<http://ow.ly/tt6Mw>) tell us that 22% of people who have had a bad experience are likely to comment about it online while only 9% of people who have had a good experience will



Don't forget to give away your knowledge and expertise as much as possible to gain credibility.



Provide videos on YouTube to show your expertise in a particular subject, sector or industry.



Make sure all your platforms are branded professionally.

...cont'd

do the same. All these numbers point to a growing trend where the reputation of a business online directly impacts bottom line revenue.

Having a strategy for reputation management is key for many businesses, especially in the service industry. Perhaps you have bought a business from a previous owner who did not have a brilliant reputation, in which case having “reputation management” as your main social media goal should be top of your list.

To keep an eye on your competition

If it is important to find out what kind of customers your competition are targeting, or what their social media marketing strategy looks like, then reason number five should be towards the top of your list.

As important as it is to keep an eye on the competition, many small business owners don't know much about what their competitors are doing to reach customers. The benefits of watching your competitors are almost immediate, you learn what you can do to make your business unique, you see their weaknesses (i.e. customer service issues) and you get great ideas to improve your own strategy.

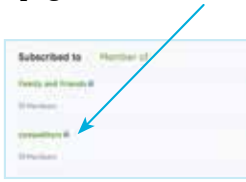
You can set up Twitter lists for all of your competitors (see the Twitter section on pages 136-140 on how to set up lists).



Don't forget you do not need to actually follow your competitors on Twitter, you simply add them to a list.



Currently, you have no option but to “like” your competitor's page if you would like to subscribe to their Facebook notifications. This will publicly notify both your own network and your competitor of your actions.



It is easy to keep an eye on your competition on Facebook by clicking the **Get Notifications** button so you do not miss any posts. Once you have done this, for any posts that appear on their page, you will see a red notification symbol on your personal profile.



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Uncover new opportunities and meet new people

Expanding your customer base has always been expensive, and it may be even more so today. In an uncertain economic climate, few companies seem ready to take the risk of starting out with new suppliers. Instead, it makes sense to look for new opportunities in industries where you are already doing business.

If new sales are top of your list, then this goal should be your number one. Your social media strategy for uncovering new opportunities will be based on listening and engagement.

There are endless strategies to gain opportunities for potential new sales. These are covered in the detailed chapters for each platform later in the book.

Customer loyalty

If you are struggling to retain customers, and find yourself having to search for new clients, then customer loyalty will be important to you. Implement a social media strategy to ensure customer retention and loyalty.

There are endless ways to keep in contact with your customers online.

- Make sure that you are tagging your customers in posts that are relevant to them. Here is an example of how you can do this on Facebook:

Tag the business in the post



- Feed your customers with regular free content utilizing your blog and social networking platforms.
- Set up Twitter lists for your current clients.
- You can tag your clients in all platforms, to say that it was good to meet with them, or Retweet their messages to your network, share their blog articles on your LinkedIn page, etc.



Remember to use the tagging facility on all networks to ensure that your customer will see the post.

...cont'd

- Have a listening strategy set up for potential customer complaints so that you can react quickly. Providing a first class service online will always help with customer retention.

Get news instantaneously

If you are a local business, then having a listening strategy for local news is key for any business. You may be in an industry that constantly needs to be ahead of the game to be successful. Therefore, this is the goal for you.

- Are you following your local newspapers and radio stations online?
- Do you have notifications set up for your local town?

To help improve your search results

Search remains the main way in which many people discover a business and Search Engine Optimization (SEO) should be a key part of your online communications strategy. An active presence on social media, sharing and distributing keyword-rich content will improve your placing on Google and other search engines, ensuring that more people find you online (see pages 31-32).

Social media is the future of communications

Social media is not a fad and it is not going away. The Net Generation – your next pool of employees, customers, and competitors – prefer to use text messaging and the social web over any other form of communication. It is the natural evolution of communications. If you are not involved in social media at this stage, then you will simply be playing catch-up in a few years' time or your business will not exist.

The social web is where a generation is going to connect, learn and discover. Ignore this at your peril! You have got to be in it to win it! Here are some examples of what we do:

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Facebook



Twitter

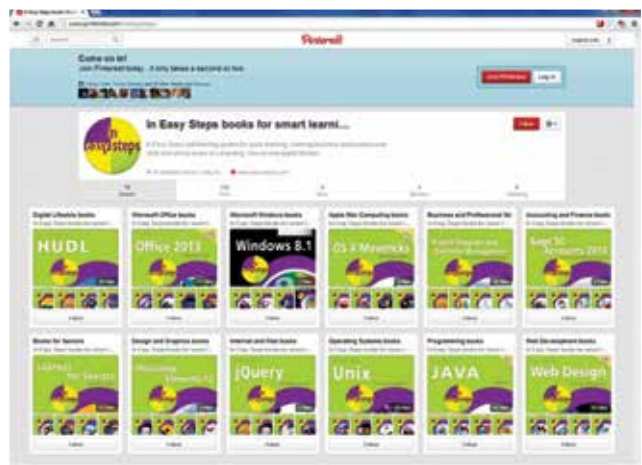


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Website



Pinterest



LinkedIn

