

# Put Your Best [Social Media] Foot Forward

BY JIM WALBOLT | [jwalbolt@enginebuildermag.com](mailto:jwalbolt@enginebuildermag.com)

The World Wide Web will continue to be a must for any business to survive.

If you think that is a bold statement, look at anyone you know under the age of about 30. Just take a look at your kids; their lives are in the palm of their hands in the shape of a cell phone. Most use it for all their communications these days, including email, texting and Internet, particularly with the smart phones that are available now. Like it or not, it will continue to be a way of life now on and into the future.

According to an *Engine Builder* Survey, more than 65 percent of you are already using the Internet to do most of your research looking for parts, machinery or equipment, and that number continues to increase. Don't you think your customers are doing the same thing? I don't even use Yellow Pages anymore: I go right to the Internet to find businesses or phone numbers.

So, we all agree on the importance of a business Web presence. An extension of that presence would be your use of "Social Media," sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and even Angie's List.

Everyone has heard of these sites, unless you've been hidden in a cave for

the last few years! Even if you haven't used them, your kids (and nearly every other human) have and are. They are all somewhat similar, but different, and best of all, in most cases they are FREE, requiring just a little bit of your time.

I want to mention one thing here. The success of your Internet marketing is directly proportional to the time you put into it. You can't just build it and hope they come: it will require regular updating to be most successful. No, you won't need to spend hours and hours each week, but you should plan on a regular schedule to update things. More about this later, but I want you to be aware that some time will be required.

So what are the benefits of using social media? Well, I think we all agree that word-of-mouth is where you gain your best customers, and all we ask is to get a customer in the door one time. As professionals, we are confident that we will impress them enough to keep them as a long term customer, right?

Simply put, social media such as Facebook is word-of-mouth on steroids. It can increase the number of consumers who are aware of your business exponentially. For instance, if a customer tells his neighbor about what a great shop you

have, the neighbor may or may not pass that recommendation on, but, if your customer writes on his Facebook page about your great shop, all his "friends" will see it too, and that could add up to hundreds. Where it really gets exciting though, is that all of those friends may each have hundreds of friends who will learn about your shop, too!

Look at it like this; that friend who wrote about you has 100 friends, but then each of those friends has 100 friends. It doesn't take long to add up: 1 X 100 = 100; 100 X 100 = 10,000. See what I mean by exponentially?

Will this get you a lot of new business? Not necessarily, but there will be 10,000 new potential customers who will learn about your shop; and while they may not need your services, they may pass the information along to someone who does. It's all about getting your name out there – isn't that why we spend money on advertising?

It's easy to get started and might be a way to get your kids involved in your business. I recommend starting out with Facebook and Twitter. Both are similar: Facebook allows more in-depth information, while Twitter is limited to 140 characters per "tweet," or brief informational,



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**“Do you have some successful racers as customers? Show them performing on YouTube.”**

inspirational or simply entertaining messages. A look at the *Engine Builder's* Facebook and Twitter pages will show you the difference.

To get started with **Facebook**, in most cases you will want to sign up as a “local business.” Once you have an account set up, you can begin to fill in information. Again, study the Facebook pages of other businesses for ideas. The information you can share on your Facebook page is virtually unlimited.

**Twitter** offers all kinds of information to lead you through the process of making your first tweet. Again, the information you put on Twitter can be just about anything, but because you are limited to 140 characters per tweet, Twitter is best for short announcements; maybe a one-day special, special holiday hours or other similar information.

**YouTube** is another great marketing tool. Perhaps you want to provide technical information to your customers. With YouTube, you can do it with video. Highlight your shop and its capabilities. Show shop operations in progress or successful projects. Anything that you think will enhance your business can be put on YouTube as a video. Do you have some successful racers as customers? Show them performing on YouTube. Once again, take a look at a company that uses YouTube to promote its business to see what you can

do. Simply create an account on YouTube and follow the instructions.

These three sites can be used by any business, whether you are strictly a business-to-business shop or you deal with the public directly. You might be surprised to learn how many customers and suppliers have Facebook and Twitter accounts.

The last site I want to talk about is **Angie's List**. While Angie's List can be used by nearly any business, it is geared around businesses that deal directly with consumers and the public. Basically, it is a way for consumers to find competent businesses to solve their needs. For instance, if you are new to town and need auto service, you might use Angie's List to find a local garage.

Consumers rate businesses on Angie's List and they pay a subscription price for that privilege. There is no cost to a business to be part of Angie's List – just sign up. You will be encouraged to get your customers to join Angie's List, and of course, the more customers you have giving positive feedback, the better. Remember, only registered Angie's List members can give feedback on your business.

There are other Social Media sites, but these four are the best known and most popular. I know some business owners are against being on these sites, they are worried about negative comments that may

be generated (and yes that can happen), but in my opinion the benefits outweigh any possible negatives.

However, it also allows you the opportunity to see what customers may be saying about you. As a business owner, that is very valuable information. You can't just stick your head in the sand and pretend it doesn't happen. An unhappy customer IS telling others about your business, whether on Facebook or just by word of mouth. Getting it out in the open though, gives you the opportunity to meet it head-on and correct anything that might need correcting or to answer any negative feedback.

You know the old saying, “If it ain't broke, don't fix it.” Well, if you don't know about a customer's problem, you can't fix it. However, just think of the positive impact it will have on your business when you do jump to fix any mistake. We all make mistakes – after all, we're just human – but it's how we handle those mistakes that determine public perception of our businesses and of us. I want a positive public perception, how about you?

These tools can work for you as they already have for thousands of businesses. Take advantage of marketing technology and start using them today! We would love to hear from any of you who have positive, or even negative, experiences with social media. **EB**



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