

HOW TO GUIDES

TOP 10 TIPS

THAT MAKE THE MOST OF PR AND SOCIAL MEDIA



When you're running a business, putting time and effort into communicating with potential customers on an ongoing basis is always going to be time well spent. And, if you follow these simple guidelines below, it doesn't have to cost much either.

Here are our 10 top tips for ensuring your PR and social media is moving in the right direction.

1. Set up Twitter and Facebook accounts

One of the first steps towards social media success is not being afraid to put yourself out there. Potential customers want to know they can get in touch whenever they want in the easiest way possible. Twitter and Facebook should be your first ports of call, simply because so many homeowners are now using them. In fact, Harris Interactive's SocialLife survey shows 38 per cent of UK consumers use social media to buy products or services, spending an average of £56 a month either directly or indirectly. A social media presence not only gives you the opportunity to secure sales by showing the quality of your products, but also allows you to respond to customer queries. It's likewise

a chance to express some personality and willingness to engage with your marketplace, which could be just what you need to set your business apart from the competition.

WHAT TO DO NOW:

- ▶ Head to Twitter and Facebook to find out more about setting up your business social media accounts
- ▶ Enter your details – you'll be asked to provide your company name and contact information
- ▶ Activate your account using the link sent to your email address

2. Show your charitable side

One way to empathise with potential customers, show a caring side to your business, and raise awareness of your products and services is to get involved in charity events. Whether it's a national fundraiser like Movember, a country-wide charity such as MacMillan or supporting a local community project, there's no shortage of ways to make your business known for all the right reasons.

This will help promote your company name and generate plenty of material to share with your followers on social media (see above) – so it's a win-win situation! Research from the Charity Commission shows 96 per cent of people believe charities play an important role in society, so offering them your support could be what's needed to help make your business better known in your marketplace.

WHAT TO DO NOW:

- ▶ Search for local charities – are there any good causes you could hold a fundraising event for, for example, in your showroom?
- ▶ A quick Google search will show whether there are any national events taking place. Some of the most common are Comic Relief, Children in Need and Movember

3. Join local forums

There are likely to be plenty of forums operating in your local area, so why not use them to your advantage? They could include anything from general discussions on where to find reliable tradespeople to prospective customers searching for hints and tips on how to improve their properties. Getting involved in these discussions shows what opportunities are out there, and may even open up some new leads.

WHAT TO DO NOW:

- ▶ Search on Google to find out what forums are in your local area. Search terms such as 'Sheffield forum' and 'conservatory advice forum' should bring the results you need
- ▶ Find some of the most recent questions posed by homeowners and give your response, even if the query might not be directly relevant to what you offer. The writer will remember you the next time they do need your services – and so will anyone else using the forum

4. Regularly update your website

Most potential customers will do a quick online search to see if you have a website – and it can be a real turn off if it's outdated. Design and branding firm Visible Logic figures show 80 per cent of customers will choose a service or company over its competitor simply because it has a better website. Meanwhile, 89 per cent agree that an out of date website decreases their trust in a business.

It's important to do whatever possible to keep the content fresh and engaging, whether it's through uploading pictures of recent installations or introducing a blog. You might also want to think about featuring a news section, which will be the ideal place to post regular updates, while keeping potential customers and those you have recently quoted a price in the loop.

WHAT TO DO NOW:

Think about updating these areas of your website:

News:	Once every 2-3 weeks
Photo page:	Whenever a job is completed
Blogs:	At least every quarter
Case studies:	Once a quarter
Homepage:	Once a year

5. Write a blog

Blogging serves various purposes. Not only does it ensure a supply of regular content to your site (which Google should reward you for in terms of search rankings – if you blog regularly you are much more likely to be on the first page!), but also gives an opportunity to promote your business and the quality service you provide.

It's certainly worth considering, as HubSpot reveals that small businesses with a blog experience 126 per cent higher lead growth than those without. It can be much more effective than Pay Per Click and doesn't cost you anything.

The trick is to keep the content relevant. For example, you might want an article suggesting how homeowners can 'beat the burglar' with a Secured by Design entrance door. Catchy, topical subjects like this are being searched by all the time and so are a great way to get people onto your website.

WHAT TO DO NOW:

- ▶ Create a blog section for your website
- ▶ Start creating relevant and engaging content
- ▶ Blog should be at around 300 words, otherwise Google is likely to ignore them in its search rankings
- ▶ Make sure the layout of the posts is accessible and encourages people to read
- ▶ You could post content to blog sites and link back to your own website for extra coverage

6. Get to know local editors

Appearing in local newspapers and regional magazines could provide your business with a real boost, so it's worth devoting some time to getting to know local editors and business desks.

They are always interested in local companies that are:

- ▶ Performing well
- ▶ Offering extra value to their customers
- ▶ Supporting charities
- ▶ Working on large or unusual projects
- ▶ Launching new products or services

If you develop good relationships, the chances are they'll be more willing to cover stories you've sent their way, giving your business more exposure.

WHAT TO DO NOW:

- ▶ Introduce yourself to contacts at local publications
- ▶ Make them aware of anything new that might be happening at your business
- ▶ Send them a press release (see opposite)

7. Issue press releases

Is your company offering a new product or service? Or have you recently been involved in a charity fundraiser? If so, make sure people know about it!

Drafting press releases is a great way of getting your business known. Email them to the media contacts you've built up and they should then appear in local publications, opening up your business to a host of potential new customers.

WHAT TO DO NOW:

- ▶ Write short and informative press releases before sending them to your local business editor
- ▶ Photographs are a must – make sure they're at least 1MB and in JPEG format

8. Sign up to review sites

Review websites can be a valuable tool for tradespeople, especially as more homeowners now use them. More than 2.3 million home improvement jobs have already been posted by homeowners looking for reliable tradespeople on the RatedPeople.com website. Carefully selecting some of these projects can be a great way to pick up work.

Alternatively, once you've completed a job, ask the customer to give you a review for other site users to see. So far, over 380,000 ratings have been supplied by homeowners on RatedPeople.com since the site began, and with reviews an important part of the selection process, this is an opportunity you can't afford to miss. There's even a photo uploading feature to show just how good your products and services really are.

5 review sites worth a look are:

- Rated People
- Trust Mark
- Check a Trade
- Trust a Trader
- My Local Trader

WHAT TO DO NOW:

- ▶ Set up accounts on review sites using the links above
- ▶ Encourage customers to share their photos/reviews on the site
- ▶ Use logos on your homepage to show potential customers you're trustworthy

9. Encourage interaction

One way to keep people interested in your business is to make it interactive. There are various ways to do this, such as running competitions and quizzes, or offering special discounts through your social media pages.

The more your content is shared, the more effective it will be at promoting your company. However, people like to feel there's an incentive for doing so, which is where some creativity might come into play.

In fact, Econsultancy figures show 33 per cent of Twitter users follow a particular brand or company to receive discounts, while 31 per cent do so to participate in giveaways. A little research could be all you need to make your social media efforts a success.

WHAT TO DO NOW:

- ▶ Come up with creative ways to encourage people to 'like' your Facebook page or follow you on Twitter
- ▶ Offers usually work well. Consider offering, for example, a 5 per cent discount for those that like your Facebook page, or run a giveaway to promote interest in your company

10. Respond to comments, good or bad

Many businesses shy away from social media because they fear negative comments from customers. However, being proactive in how you deal with complaints could be just what you need. Whether someone is praising a recent job you did or raising a concern, this is your ideal opportunity to show them there's a person behind the business.

The 2015 UK Customer Satisfaction Index from the Institute of Customer Service found that 13.4 per cent of consumers had a problem with a business' ability to deal with their complaints. Speed and responsiveness was a factor in 24 per cent of these issues, which is something you can overcome with the effective use of social media.

How you deal with a disgruntled customer is the differentiator between you and your competitors. For example, you could request their contact details to discuss their complaint in more detail, or offer to inspect the work again to see what can be done to rectify the problem. Responding in some way or another is better than ignoring the issue all together!

Don't forget that most homeowners are savvy with social media so if you ignore their requests, they can soon spread unfair comments about your business. It is better that you are proactive!

WHAT TO DO NOW:

- ▶ Monitor feedback on all your social media
- ▶ Be proactive and respond to comments. Thank people for their praise and take steps to rectify any problems customers might have
- ▶ Don't ignore criticism – potential customers will be much more responsive and appreciative if you deal with issues head on

