

twitter

And popularity among the business crowd should intensify moving forward. Twitter introduced its first effort to help businesses monetize their Twitter campaigns with the release of “Twitter 101 for Business” in July 2009. The guide walks a business through the Twitter environment and includes a multitude of business case studies showcasing multiple avenues for capitalizing on Twitter’s potential benefit to your business.

The guide is an indication that Twitter is finally getting serious about business usage of its site. Expect more useful tools and guidance in the future, and leverage these to gain a competitive advantage against competitors who may not be aware of these changes.

There are certainly a few companies that have learned to generate a massive following on Twitter already. Zappos, as mentioned earlier, now has more than 1 million followers, and JetBlue has more than 970K followers.

And small businesses and freelancers are enjoying success on Twitter as well, with Brian Clark’s Copyblogger account acquiring more than 30K followers and Green Business Daily’s GreenBizDaily account more than 21K. Local Getaways generated 20K visits to its website through its Twitter account in just 2 months. NakedPizza in New Orleans ran a promotion on Twitter that wound up driving record daily sales and accounting for more than 68% of the restaurant’s business.

Looking to the future, expect Twitter to become much more like a real-time search engine. On July 28th, 2009 Twitter introduced a completely new, redesigned home page. Whereas the old home page design centered around the idea of a social networking platform, the new home page design is centered around “Search and Discovery.” A search box is front and center and dominates the page. Search trends occupy approximately a third of the real estate, including real-time, daily and weekly trends.

What this means for small business is that Twitter may evolve as a faster, real-time search engine, portraying Google and Bing as too slow to keep pace with today’s fast moving world. Keep your eye on usage statistics moving forward, as being found on Twitter (when someone types in a non-brand search) may become just as important as it is on Google.

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b. **facebook**

Facebook boasts over 250 million active users, and of those, an astonishing 120 million log in to their accounts on a daily basis. Thirty million users access Facebook via a mobile device. In total, more than 1 billion pieces of content are shared weekly on Facebook. And the social networking platform is growing in “stickiness” as well, with a 700% increase in time spent-on-site from April 2008 to April 2009 (Source: Nielsen).

More than a million developers and entrepreneurs are leveraging the Facebook platform. For any software developer or enterprising startup, opportunities abound for new Facebook widgets and applications.

Although Facebook originated as an online social environment for students, it is now very much a platform for the masses. More than two-thirds of Facebook users are outside of college. The fastest-growing segment of users is over 35 years old.

And Facebook continues to grow, with more than 5 million new accounts weekly. Representing a good opportunity for your business, more than 8 million users become “Fans” of pages each day.

The most popular brands on Facebook include Starbucks (more than 3.7 million fans), Coca-Cola (more than 3.5 million fans) and Pringles (more than 2.7 million fans). But you don’t need to be a food/beverage brand nor a big brand in order to enjoy success with Facebook. For example, adidas has more than 1.9 million friends, the yoga outfitter lululemon athletica has more than 56K fans, and the surf store The Blue Groove has more than 20K fans.

Effective uses of Facebook by businesses include Pringles’ introduction of humorous videos and Starbucks’ use of coupons and promotions (e.g., a free ice-cream day in July 2009 generated close to 200K new Fans of their Facebook page). adidas runs contests through its Facebook page, including its recent joint contest with MTV for an all-expenses-paid “house party.” Red Bull’s inclusion of Tweets from famous athletes and snowboarders is an interesting way to offer unique content and differentiate itself from competitors, as well.

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facebook

A big recent change with Facebook was the introduction of vanity usernames, enabling users to specify the URL associated with their Facebook account (e.g., facebook.com/john.smith). This move also applied to companies (e.g., facebook.com/starbucks), albeit with a delayed introduction for companies new to Facebook or for those with fewer than 1000 fans. This is a major benefit to companies, and it would behoove any company active on Facebook with its own Fan Page to register a vanity username. This will make it easier for people to find you within Facebook as well as make it more likely that the search engines will pick up your Fan Page.

Another major event for Facebook, which will affect all online retailers moving forward, was the first eCommerce transaction fully made within the Facebook environment. On July 8th, 1-800-Flowers launched a new “Shop!” tab within its Facebook Fan Page, enabling customers to make a purchase right then and there, without the need to jump to the actual 1800Flowers.com website. 1-800-Flowers is relying on eCommerce software developed by Alvenda for the initiative, and this is sure to be a game changer for small businesses interested in leveraging the Facebook platform to sell to their audience.

And just because 1-800-Flowers has taken the lead does not mean that it has tapped its potential. In fact, it’s hardly leveraged the unique social qualities of Facebook in any respect with the launch of its Facebook store. Instead, the experience feels very much as if you were on the 1-800-Flowers site itself. In the future, expect retailers to start innovating and incorporating various social features into the buying experience, whether the ability to ask friends their opinions on purchases while you’re browsing options, or whether going in on a group gift and dividing the bill accordingly with your friends, etc.

c. LinkedIn®

LinkedIn is the most popular business networking site online, with more than 40 million users and more than 12.4 million monthly unique visitors (MUV). This is roughly DOUBLE the traffic that the site experienced as recently as December 2008, when it had 6.3 MUV. The overall number of minutes spent on LinkedIn.com by users has increased 69% from April 2008 to April 2009 (Source: Nielson).

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