

Sell More, Now:

Increase your value as an employee by deploying your social media skills for your store.

Robyn Volkening

Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter and the like are not fads.

They are increasingly becoming a major factor in buyers' purchasing decisions. Online trendspotter Mashable.com reports that by 2015, social commerce sales are expected to contribute \$30 billion each year, with half of all web sales to occur via social media.

If your store is not maximizing its social media presence and you're a salesperson with a knack for social media, develop a social media marketing plan and present it to your business' owner or manager. By following through on these successful social media techniques, you can prove yourself invaluable to your store, while increasing your sales and your commissions.

And if you think that the social media phenomenon only works in mainstream companies, take a closer look. One of Western & English Today's retailers reports that, in the days leading up to Christmas 2012, their website was producing \$50,000 PER DAY in sales — primarily driven by social media. That's incremental business on top of what they sold in that timeframe in their brick-and-mortar store. This retailer made a business decision to dedicate a full-time person to social media, and it paid off huge for them.

Are you "FiredUp?" And will you be that person at your store?

1.) BE PERSONAL: Many believe that word-of-mouth marketing is the strongest endorsement a business can have. Social media elevates that word-of-mouth to a higher level. If a customer posts or tweets how much she loves her new jacket, or that she had a great sales experience in your store, instead of only telling her spouse or best friend, she's now telling, say, 554 of her Facebook friends, or 1,285 of her Twitter followers. And if any of these folks need a jacket, they might click right over to your website to see what their friend is so excited about. Couple this with the traffic you can drive for your store by being proactive with social media, and you have a powerful sales engine, indeed.

2.) BE FREQUENT: Another important component to your success is to monitor social media networks daily, if not constantly. Customers expect interaction and quick responses to their online inquiries. By responding to their posts, questions, comments, and yes, even negative feedback, you're building a relationship with them and also showing other followers

who see the posts that you care about your store's customers — when people feel a connection with a company, they are more inclined to buy.

3.) BE RELEVANT: Integrate your social media presence into your marketing plan to help build a loyal customer base, which looks to you as a go-to resource. Your Facebook page, for instance, should showcase your logo, colors, and branding, and be attractive to a consumer, with proper grammar, spelling and information. Clearly display your store hours, website, and physical address in the "about" area on Facebook. Include clickable links on your store's website to your social media applications, so that anyone shopping your website can easily follow you on your chosen social media outlets. Any time you can link your online store, retail store and social media in the minds of consumers, you're building your brand and increasing interaction with the customer.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the second installment of Western & English Today's yearlong "Marketing to Millennials" initiative, directed to your store's frontline salespeople, who are often millennials themselves. We encourage you to share this with your employees, and welcome your feedback.

— Susan L. Ebert, Associate Publisher & Editor

FIRE UP!

4.) BE CONSISTENT: Consistency is crucial in building a social media audience. Make a social media schedule or calendar, with specific timing and goals, to build this consistency, so followers can expect things at certain times or days of the week. For instance, you could run a sale every Monday morning or a new product announcement every Tuesday. Also, reposting news that you find relevant to your customers' interests builds a relationship and sets the tone for your online brand personality.

5.) BE VALUABLE: Social media can be useful for building a loyal fan base, but it can also be used to promote sales, events, and also for contests. Rod's Western Palace, a retail store with a large catalog and internet sales division in Columbus, Ohio, uses online codes for its sales, and promotes the sales via Facebook and Twitter. When they use a code, the response is generally instantaneous, shown by a spike in website traffic.

Crickett Normandin handles Rod's social media marketing, and says that they see their Facebook, Twitter and blog activities as important to "engage with the customer on a personal level" and build rapport with their customer "showing that we have a huge knowledge base here at Rod's, and we live this lifestyle." Crickett is quick to point out that they see sales as a side benefit to forming a relationship with their community, and that their website has been more established as a selling tool, along with email promotions, for many years, while their Facebook and Twitter accounts have been active for six years and their blog for two. They post two to three times per day on Facebook and once per week on their blog.

6.) BE COMPETITIVE: Online, even small stores can have an advantage. With the costs of social media being very low, everyone is on an almost-equal playing field. As a matter of fact, sometimes the small businesses do an even better job than the big guys due to quick response and excellent personal service. For instance, Santa Fe on the Brazos in Benjamin, Texas, population 261, has more than 700 Facebook fans, and Cry Baby Ranch, a boutique in Denver, has nearly 1,000. Both stores use Facebook to showcase new products, announce store events and trunk shows, show customer photos and testimonials, and yes, even make direct sales. With social media, even the small stores can ship a product anywhere, and by being nimble, they can compete head-to-head with larger stores.

7.) BE TACTICAL: Online retailer Country Outfitter has garnered more than a half-BILLION fans on Facebook as a result of very successful online contests where fans must "like" and "share" their posts to win a pair of boots. When a fan shares the post, friends see the post, and they want to win the boots, so they like and share as well! That's the beauty of social media and viral posts. Each one of Country Outfitters posts has a link to that product on their website, so customers can buy it immediately. When you click through to their website, they ask for your email address to enter the contest. This is a "next level" tactic, where they are building their own email database to use for email marketing

in the future (running a contest directly on Facebook is prohibited). After customers provide their email addresses on Country Outfitter's website, they receive a pop-up message that they have a \$10 credit to use for shopping immediately, and an email thanking them for entering the contest, with another beautiful boot photo, and links to their social media and website again, with a reminder that the \$10 credit is good for that day only. Integrating these tactics enhances the message to the consumer.

8.) BE TECHNOLOGICALLY SAVVY: One person can only do so much, so research appropriate software that can streamline your workload. Apps such as Hootsuite allow you to manage all of your social networks under one interface. Ginny Parker, owner of Whispering Cowgirl, started her business online and then opened a bricks-and-mortar store. She uses a third-party application with her shopping cart that automates contests and sale items going onto Facebook. It takes care of all the rules and regulations and makes people "like" her page and supply email addresses to enter contests. It also randomly selects winners, distancing her from the process.

9.) BE VISUAL: One of the reasons these retailers' Facebook promotions and sales have been successful is that the products they showcase are attractive to the customer. Photos you post online should be well-lit, and highlight the product's details and features well. If you can't take your own professional photos, including nice backgrounds, lighting, and Photoshop touch-ups if needed, request product photos from your manufacturers. Most of them will be happy to help you promote their products online. Whispering Cowgirl uses Pinterest, the online bulletin board, to run its contest, "Pin It To Win It," in which followers pin an item to their boards from the website, and then one "pinner" wins the item or a gift certificate to the store.

10.) BE ANALYTICAL: Another benefit to social media marketing is that tactics are very easy to track, so you can quickly learn when your target customers are online and what types of posts they like. By sharing your posts with friends, or "liking" them, your fans will quickly help you dial in your strategies to what type of post or promotion works for them, and what creates interest and sales for your company.

Colorado-based business development, marketing and public relations consultant **Robyn Volkening** has a master's degree in integrated marketing and lifelong equine experience that she employs to build brand loyalty and increase sales for a variety of Western- and equine-industries, from jeans to tack to horse trailers. With experience on both the wholesale and retail side, Robyn loves promoting the Western lifestyle. Her writing and/or photography have been published in *The Reiner*, *Rodeo News*, *Horse & Rider*, *Equestrian Retailer*, *Western Lifestyle Retailer*, *Mile High Dog*, and *Western & English Today*. Visit her website at vstrategyonline.com.