

Could Your Company Be More Pinteresting?

5 tips on how to make Pinterest work for B2B

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September 5, 2012

"I know I should be pinning, but I have no idea why and what!" the owner of a service business recently said to me. Many small businesses feel compelled to catch the Pinterest wave, but are struggling with what to do with this relative newcomer on the social media scene.

Pinterest, an online bulletin board comprised of shareable images and blurbs, now boasts close to 18 million users. It is the fastest-growing social media content sharing service in history, surpassing the fan-building speed of LinkedIn, YouTube, and Google+ combined.

The majority of early Pinterest adopters were female (68 percent). It found its first target market among brides, Midwestern moms, craft aficionados, and foodies. Like many social media sites, it is also being adopted by big brands and media companies like Whole Foods, Toyota, and Real Simple to engage its consumer communities through promotions, contests, and shared content.

Why should you care about a bunch of women sharing recipes and fashion online? According to e-commerce platform Shopify, those referred to Shopify stores from Pinterest are 10 percent more likely to make a purchase than those who arrive from other social sites. The average purchase price on Shopify's online stores of items shared on Pinterest (\$80) is double the average order from a Facebook referral (\$40).

Even if you don't have a tangible product to sell, Pinterest can be a tremendous awareness-builder. If your content is interesting, users will re-pin it or simply like it, sharing your brand name with others in the Pinterest community. As with other social media, users can follow other people, ensuring your brand gets repeat exposure.

So, how do service businesses and business-to-business marketers take advantage of Pinterest's wide reach and unique appeal? Tax filing services, insurance agents, and divorce mediators do not have the visual appeal of a pair of hoop earrings or a recipe for lowfat chocolate cheesecake. However, every business has a visual side. In fact, if you search "accounting" in Pinterest, you'll actually find some fascinating and whimsical visual content!

Here are five tips for applying the best practices of Pinterest to your business-to-business and prospect engagement efforts.

1. Brand Your Boards. Think about your Pinterest boards as your online corporate headquarters or brand museum. If you were decorating the walls of your office space, how would you select items to display? Photos of the pioneers and innovators of your industry, famous inspirational quotes, and visual displays of data (known as infographics) make for interesting content, as do videos. While you can create original content, you don't need to do so in order to be a pro pinner; you can also share interesting tidbits you find online. Add your own (positive) comments to each pin, so your viewers get a sense of your brand voice.

2. Mix It Up. Content should be constantly changing and building. Add new pins to your boards at least once a week. Adding a Pin It button, available from Pinterest's website, to your desktop toolbar will enable you to easily share images and facts you find while perusing websites. Change your cover photos and rearrange your board placement to keep your content fresh.

3. Know the Language and the Etiquette. Read the Pinterest rules carefully. Make sure you credit any website you use as a source of a pin. Do not pin product ads or promotions, but sharing a URL to an informative newsletter or photo of your office is probably within the bounds of tasteful self-promotion. Put yourself in the viewer's shoes, and ask yourself, "What is the benefit of this post to the viewer?" If it's not educational, inspirational, or motivational, think twice.

4. Build a Community. Use the search function to find relevant content on other boards and like and follow the people or organizations where that content originated. Google the pinners you respect and consider connecting with them on LinkedIn or Facebook. Be sure to let your current customers and prospects know they can find you

on Pinterest. Add it to your email signature, e-newsletter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and your company's website. You can even link Pinterest to Facebook and Twitter, so your pins appear as new content to your current friend and follower base. Pinterest can be an interesting and easy way to build team spirit within your organization, too. Rotate pinning duties among your staff or have a "pin party" over coffee to brainstorm and search for content ideas. As with any creative exercise, your team will feel more connected to your business and the brand.

5. Track and Measure. Pinterest for business-to-business marketers is all about brand awareness and community-building. Do not expect a prospect to pick up the phone and offer you a six-figure retainer just because he likes your pins. However, like blogs, public speaking, public relations, and other forms of social media, Pinterest can help establish you and your business as an accessible, innovative, knowledgeable, and connected leader in your field. Review your boards every week and you'll be able to track followers, re-pins, and likes. They are all measures of social media engagement. Look beyond the numbers, too. Pay attention to which content is being re-pinned and liked the most, and create more pins for similar categories.

Pinterest can be used for any type of business, however as with all social media, you must have the right type of industry, passion level, target market, creativity, technical skills, and resources to support your effort. If you believe Pinterest is right for your business, but you just don't have time for one more social media site, consider outsourcing.

Pinterest, like PR, takes time and focus to deliver results. Be patient, be progressive, and be interesting, and you could ultimately prosper. Remember, it's all part of an integrated marketing strategy to build your brand image and keep you top of mind with prospects and clients.

This article was originally published in the New York Enterprise Report.