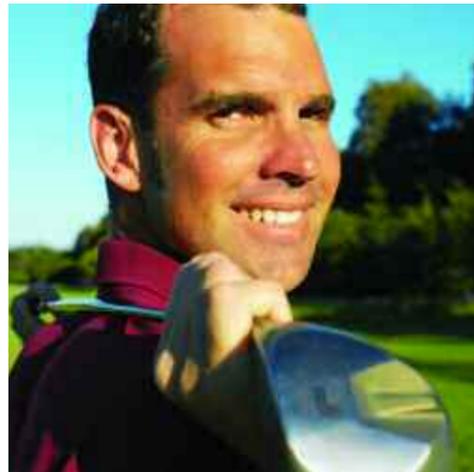


Search

Home Profile Account



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WHAT IS SOCIAL MEDIA?

Social Media has been around for a long time, thousands of years really. Social Media has been around since the Old Course at St. Andrews began operating in 1574. It was simply called talking! Social Media is a conversation and people have been having conversations forever.

Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube, Digg etc., are now the platform much like the telephone or the CB radio. In today's world the consumer is connecting in a much more personal way with brands or golf courses than they ever used to. Wikipedia defines the term Social Media as "the use of web-based and mobile technologies to turn communication into an interactive dialogue."

THE TIME IS NOW

The golf industry has an excellent opportunity to take advantage of what 'social' offers. After all, we are in the people business and people like conversation and interaction. In the golf business we have to be good at communication, conversation, interaction and bring something of value to a conversation.

People are tired of having messages pushed at them with marketing like television, print, radio and even the eNewsletter. More than ever people want conversation and they want it with your brand or golf course on the platform that they choose. It wasn't that long ago that we had no, or limited, access to brands and CEOs but now we are basing our loyalty to businesses on who engages with us.

"The conversation is happening and you cannot control it, but you can join in and steer it," said Shane Gibson author of *Sociable! How Social Media is Turning Sales and Marketing Upside Down and Guerrilla Social Media Marketing*.

BeSocial!

Social Media for the Golf Industry



Social Media is about engagement and connecting with your customers and potential customers. Before we explore the social sites, we should spend a good portion of our time listening. You should hear what people are talking about and when the time is right contribute and add value to the conversation.

Michael Mather, General Manager at the University Golf Club in Vancouver, B.C. has been using Social Media at his Club for two years. He believes awareness of both positive and negative comments is an important factor in their use of Social Media. "We want to be responsive to positive posts about our Club and at the same time if anything negative gets said we want to be able to respond and

get out in front of it before it spirals into something larger. The top current social platforms also provide us with a great way to monitor what is next for social as it continues to evolve."

University Golf Club uses Twitter and Facebook primarily, and are experimenting with Google+ and Pinterest currently. They have seen good success with awareness on Twitter and Facebook to fill empty tee times but it took about 18 months to build a following that acted on their 'social' posts.

BUILDING TRUST

Social Media marketing can greatly enhance your advertising strategy, but it is not a replacement for it. Caledon

Country Club in Inglewood, Ontario has been using Social Media for the last season and Kelly Myles, General Manager says she feels "loyalty and reactions to our posts increased over the year. While this is great and we believe it is helping with our loyalty, we are not sure if we saw new customers from Social Media last season."

Social Media is not a short-term project. It can take time to build trust and credibility in the marketplace. Trust is not built overnight. Mather added, "costs are minimal for Social Media and we want to make sure we engage and provide updates to our customers in the format they choose to receive it, whether it be print, email or social."

Facebook and YouTube have become two of the most common ways that people find brands and businesses on the web. Think about that for a moment! More people than ever are going to find your business using a Facebook or YouTube search. Social Media is not a fad, it is here to stay and is getting bigger each day.

Keith Gibson, Owner and Operator of Long Beach Golf Course in Tofino, B.C. has been using Social Media for a couple of years and was one of the early Twitter and Facebook adopters for his business in British Columbia. He says "businesses can't do without Social Media anymore." He states that people he hasn't heard from in a few weeks will all of a sudden comment on his Facebook post or re-Tweet a message on Twitter. "Engagement levels for customers are at an all time high. Customers feel good when they are engaged by a brand, in this case our golf course."

Gibson believes that Social Media is difficult to measure; however it is no more difficult than trying to determine the success of a print marketing campaign or advertisement. His main objective for 2012 is to narrow his focus and search (using hashtags on Twitter and Facebook's search engine) for more followers specifically within his geographic region using search. He feels new customers are out there and in 2012 he is going to go and find them using Social Media. Gibson also said "I am spending my time on social media in 2012 and saving my cash by not doing print." There is more to search than just Google, if you want to find customers try using Twitter and Facebook's search engines. Search for keywords, phrases and even you city. There is a good chance you will find something relevant to your business.

SOCIAL MEDIA AT YOUR COURSE

There is little to no cost at getting started with a couple of Social Media platforms, all it requires is time. The key to success is to be consistent and have someone

regularly posting to your Social Media platforms. That person should not only know the platform but be engaging and a conversationalist with a great personality. At University Golf Club Mather uses his marketing team, Myles has a staff member at Caledon and Long Beach's Gibson does 100% of his own posting on social sites.

Some companies have strict Social Media policies, but the most effective companies have a more loosely structured policy. A good line to adhere to for your staff could be as simple as "if you wouldn't say it on the phone, don't say it on Twitter or Facebook." Some organizations worry about time spent on social media and how much it may take to be effective. A good Social Media strategy can be done in as little as 30 minutes per day. The key is to break the 30 minutes up into six 5 minute time slots per day. Spend a few minutes listening and respond to any comments you may have.

One of the interesting things that Mather has noticed at his Club is the frequency that people 'check-in' at the Club using Social Media. Sites like Facebook and Foursquare make it easy for customers to connect with your brand while they are on site at your facility. This gives you a great opportunity to find people who are at your facility and are already your customers and say thank you. What a great way to begin building trust from brand to consumer. "University Golf Club has had over 1,700 check-ins on Facebook and Foursquare in 2011," he said.

THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL

So what is the future of Social Media? Don MacKay, Owner of Muskoka Highlands in Bracebridge, Ontario and President of the NGCOA Canada has been using Social Media for the past two years. MacKay believes that "engagement and entertainment counts for something. We know, see and get feedback that people like what we are doing." When people like what a product or business is

doing it is going to build loyalty and conversation about your brand will spread with Social Media.

MacKay does ask the question: "When do we get to the point where Social Media can transact? The next step is to move past engagement and loyalty and get people to take action. The real metric will be how much did they buy." Today statistics are telling us that 90% of people are buying because of personal recommendations and often those endorsements are coming from Social Media.

More than ever people are trying to question the return on investment of Social Media. Often it is a question of justification to the owner or the boss. Social Media seems to often come under much more scrutiny than many other marketing platforms. We should want to talk to our customers. There are likely dozens if not hundreds of conversations happening around us everyday and you need to get involved. When you question the ROI of Social Media ask yourself what is the ROI of your telephone? Conversation is business!

I leave you with this final quote "If your market is people. If your niche is human beings, then you need to be on social media," Scott Stratten, Author of *UnMarketing*. So be social – you may be surprised at the results!



JEFF
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For more information, contact the National Golf Course Owners Association Canada at 866-626-4262 or to sign up contact Janet Jones, at jjones@ngcoa.ca or 204-282-6422.