

10 Small Business Social Media Marketing Tips

I suggest you begin by outlining clear goals for your social media marketing efforts and figuring out how you'll measure success. Once you've outlined your goals, let's look at 10 great ways you can begin to leverage social media for your marketing efforts.

1. Facebook



[Facebook](#) ([F](#)) offers exceptional, low cost marketing opportunities for small business. Facebook now has over 300 million users, and while that seems like an outrageous number for small businesses to be targeting, Facebook offers a very powerful platform on which to build a presence. If you're not already active on Facebook; you should get started right away.

Basic Strategy: If you haven't signed up for [Facebook](#) yet, you absolutely should as soon as possible. Once you've signed up, you should also consider securing your company's username. Be aware, however, that if you reserve your company name for your personal account, you won't be able to use it for your Business Fan Page (more on those in the Advanced Strategy), so you may want to create a Page before registering your company's name. Fan Pages have special rules regarding usernames, which you can read [here](#).

You should do one other thing: search for your competitors and evaluate their Facebook presence. What types of Pages have they built? How many fans or "friends" do they have? Spend

15 minutes (per competitor) looking at their posts, photos and/or videos to understand how they're using Facebook.

Advanced Strategy: You may already have a personal Facebook account, but how do you extend that presence for your business? You have several options. You can register a Business Account – which is designed for a very simple presence on Facebook. There are many limitations on such accounts (read the [FAQ here](#)), however, so you'll most likely prefer to have a Business Fan Page. A [Business Fan Page](#) lets you create a page where customers or fans of your business can register as a “fan” — expanding the presence of your business (because your updates will also flow to their pages). You might also want to consider running hyper-local ads on Facebook.

2. Twitter



[Twitter](#) ([=D](#)) has grown tremendously over the past year. For some small businesses, it offers an incredible marketing platform. BusinessWeek's recent profile of [20 ways businesses use Twitter](#) might give you some ideas about how you can leverage Twitter for your business.

Basic Strategy: If you haven't signed up on [Twitter](#) yet, you should sign up today and reserve an account in the name of your business. While you might ultimately tweet in your own name, you'll want to have the option to tweet from a business account. More importantly, you don't want your competitors to register your business name. Twitter has put together a [simple guide](#) to help you understand what Twitter can do for business. You can also check out Mashable's ([=D](#)) [Twitter Guide](#).

Next, you should spend 15-30 minutes on Twitter’s homepage, doing basic searches to become familiar with the type of content available on the service. For example, if you are operating a small gift basket business, do some searches for various terms and phrases such as “gift basket,” “gifts,” “gift basket business,” etc. You should also search for the names of your competitors to see whether they’re on Twitter and if they are, how they’re using it. And don’t forget to search for your small business name – your customers may already be talking about you! Once you become comfortable with the content that’s already available and how your competitors are using Twitter, you can begin thinking about a strategy for how you’ll leverage Twitter for your business.

Advanced Strategy: To truly leverage Twitter, you’ll want to learn and use a few more advanced tools. This includes desktop and mobile Twitter clients like [TweetDeck](#) (☐), [Seismic](#) (☐), and [Tweetie](#) (☐). Desktop clients give you more flexibility and more control over your Twitter strategy than you’ll have on the Twitter website. Among other things, you’ll be able to pre-define searches (so that you can monitor certain keywords, including your business name) and group people you follow so that you can minimize the noise and focus on the real content. You might also consider using a web tool like [Twitterfall](#), which will allow you to define (and color-code) various custom searches that you can review from time to time, and also to follow trending topics. For example, I use Twitterfall to identify helpful graphic design and industrial design resources to share with the crowdSPRING community.

3. Company Blog



Although there’s more attention focused today on social networks than on company blogs, blogs continue to offer great value for small businesses.

Basic Strategy: At a minimum, you should consider reserving a domain name for your blog – if you don’t already have a custom domain for your business. If you’re comfortable enough to set up your own blog, that’s generally the best way to proceed – although this requires a bit more

technical knowledge (many hosting providers offer a 1 step easy setup for blogs that will automatically install WordPress [\(=D\)](#) for you). You can also setup a blog directly at [WordPress.com \(? \)](#) (it's easier to do, but you don't have full control over everything that you would on your own site).

One easy alternative is to set up a simple blog at [Posterous \(=E\)](#) – a place to post stories, photos, videos, MP3s, and files. There are pluses and minuses to all of these options – you should take some time to compare them and do what makes sense for your business. I caution you only about spreading yourself too thin.

Advanced Strategy: Now that you've decided to start or improve your small business blog, how do you build an audience for it? It all starts with great content. Decide on a focus for your blog, and write awesome content that people will enjoy. For example, some months ago at my company, we decided that we wanted to write more about small business issues, so we've been writing original posts focusing on issues affecting small businesses. Think about your expertise and more importantly, think about the things that you're interested in writing about. A blog requires a long term investment of time (and resources), and you don't want to be stuck writing about things that bore you.

You'll also want to consider how you can make it easier for your readers to help promote your content. For example, install helpful plug-ins, such as a [TweetMeme \(=E\)](#) button, which makes it easy for people to retweet your posts on Twitter. Don't be afraid to experiment with plugins to add to the functionality of your blog, but keep it simple. You want to keep the blog focused, and easy for your readers to use.

4. LinkedIn

The screenshot shows the LinkedIn homepage. At the top left is the LinkedIn logo. To the right of the logo are links for 'Home', 'What is LinkedIn?', 'Join Today', and 'Sign In', along with a 'Language' dropdown menu. Below the navigation is a main content area with the headline 'Over 50 million professionals use LinkedIn to exchange information, ideas and opportunities'. Underneath this headline are three icons with text: 'Stay informed about your contacts and industry', 'Find the people & knowledge you need to achieve your goals', and 'Control your professional identity online'. On the right side of the main content area is a 'Join LinkedIn Today' registration form. The form includes fields for 'First Name', 'Last Name', 'Email', and 'Password' (with a note '8 or more characters'). Below the password field is a green 'Join Now' button and a link for 'Already on LinkedIn? Sign in.'. At the bottom of the main content area is a search bar with the text 'Search for someone by name:' and input fields for 'First Name' and 'Last Name', followed by a 'Go' button. Below the search bar is a 'People directory:' link followed by a list of letters 'A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z' and a 'more' link. At the very bottom of the page is a small disclaimer: '* By clicking Join Now, you are indicating that you have read, understood, and agree to LinkedIn's User Agreement and Privacy Policy.'

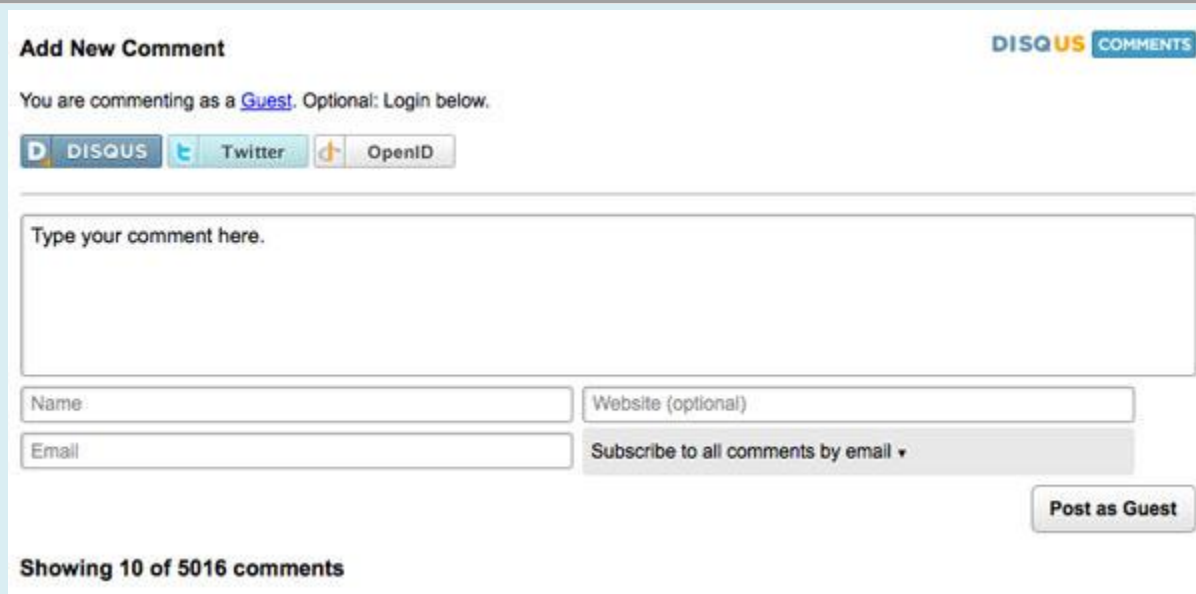
[LinkedIn](#) () is a business oriented social network for professionals, and it's huge, with nearly 50 million members from over 200 countries.

Basic Strategy: Once again, you'll want to at least reserve your business name (or your personal name) so that others can't use it. Similar to the way you might start exploring Facebook and Twitter, you should look around on [LinkedIn](#) to see how your competitors are using the service. You might also look up your customers and connect with them.

Advanced Strategy: LinkedIn has some powerful features that most people don't use. For example, you can encourage your customers, clients or vendors to give you a "recommendation" on your profile. Recommendations are useful because they'll make you and your business more credible with new customers. If you're a roofer, for example, ask your customers to recommend you after a successful job. You'll find such recommendations useful – particularly since your LinkedIn profile will come up high in search engine results. I recommend that you read Chris Brogan's post from last year discussing the [elements of a good LinkedIn recommendation](#).

Another strategy involves the many subject matter groups on LinkedIn. Find some groups that have a connection to your small business and become involved in the conversations. Answer questions when you can, and help to establish yourself as knowledgeable about specific topics related to your business. There are many small business and general marketing groups that will be very useful resources for you, and if there isn't a group that interests you, consider starting one.

5. Participate On Other Blogs



The image shows a Disqus comment form. At the top left, it says "Add New Comment" and at the top right, "DISQUS COMMENTS". Below that, it says "You are commenting as a [Guest](#). Optional: Login below." There are three buttons: "DISQUS", "Twitter", and "OpenID". A large text area is labeled "Type your comment here." Below the text area are two input fields: "Name:" and "Website (optional)". Below the "Name" field is an "Email" field. To the right of the "Email" field is a checkbox labeled "Subscribe to all comments by email" with a dropdown arrow. At the bottom right is a button labeled "Post as Guest". At the bottom left, it says "Showing 10 of 5016 comments".

It might seem counter-intuitive for you to spend your valuable time by participating in discussions on other people's blogs, but the payoff can be very valuable. Remember that it takes time to build a reputation and establish your credibility, and you can't always expect everyone to come to you. Sometimes, you have to go out and build your own credibility and reputation.

Basic Strategy: Identify 2-3 blogs in your industry, or those that focus on small business, and get into the habit of regularly reading the content and participating in the discussions. Whenever you can, try to add value by sharing a personal story about what has/has not worked for you. Get to know the writers – they'll be valuable contacts for you. One strategy for identifying good blogs is to use Guy Kawasaki's [Alltop](#), which is a directory of popular blogs across many different subject areas. For example, for blogs focused on crafts, you might follow [this page](#) on Alltop. If you want to participate in blogs focusing on small business issues, you might start at Technorati's list of the [Top 100 Small Business blogs](#).

Advanced Strategy: Once you've spent some time on other blogs and have participated in discussions, you'll find that you've built a level of credibility and trust, based on your participation. You should consider reaching out to the blog owners and asking whether they'd allow you to guest post an article on their blog (kind of like this post). This is a nice way for you to get in front of a bigger audience, and many blog owners will invite guests to post from time to time. Agree on a topic in advance and provide a draft of your post sufficiently in advance of the publication date to give them an opportunity to review.

Alternatively, ask if they would consider guest posting on *your* blog. Since you're looking to attract more readers (and more potential customers), either option works well for that purpose. Don't worry so much about going after the A-list blogs right away. There are many excellent blogs and it might take a bit of time to build your reputation to such a level that you'll have opportunities to post in the top blogs. That doesn't mean you should wait, though – make opportunities for yourself and offer to guest write whenever you can find a new audience. I recommend you read [How To Guest Post To Promote Your Blog](#) from blogging expert Darren Rowse.

6. Mobile Social Networks and other Local Strategies



[Yelp](#) () publishes millions of reviews about local businesses. [Foursquare](#) () is a combination city-guide, friend finder and competitive game. It allows users to “check in” by cell phone at a local venue and announce this via other social networks such as Twitter.

Basic Strategy: Yelp, Foursquare, and other mobile social networks can be powerful marketing channels for small businesses. You should at the very least register accounts on the popular services and get to know them. If you have a restaurant or a retail store, for example, you’ll want to get to know Yelp pretty well. You can set up a business account on Yelp (no cost), which will let you answer questions about your business, track how many Yelp users view your business page, add information about your business, and announce special promotions. Similarly, you’ll want to sign up with Foursquare to take advantage of local advertising opportunities. Using Foursquare, you’ll be able to push promotions to potential customers who’re in the vicinity of your business.

You should also consider other local strategies. For example, you can [add your business to Google Maps](#), or update your listing to include additional details. You can do the [same on Bing](#).


Advanced Strategy: If you believe that your business can truly benefit from a presence on Yelp, Foursquare, or similar networks, you’ll want to do more than just register accounts with those services. For example, Yelp allows you to include a website URL for your business. Nearly all sites will let you upload photos to your profile, and photos will make your profile more trustworthy.


You can also proactively use Yelp and other similar services to promote your business. Ask your customers, friends and family who have used your services for a review on Yelp. You can encourage reviews by running promotions or discounts – offering free appetizers, for example, to a customer who will write a review about their meal at your restaurant (or to one who already wrote a review), or a small discount to a customer who hires you for carpentry work and mentions that they found you through Yelp.

Similarly, you can find ways to promote your business using Foursquare and similar networks. If you have a TV display in your store connected to a computer, you can display the people who are checking in. You can offer specials or discounts to the person who visits your location the most (this is similar to frequent buyer cards that many businesses have used for years).


Don’t forget to also consider how you can improve your use of other basic local strategies. For example, many small business websites are optimized for specific keywords or subject areas, but are rarely optimized for local searches. If you have a gift basket business, you’ll want to be sure that users searching for gift baskets in your geographic area will find you.

be nearly impossible for you to evaluate the success of your social media marketing efforts. But analytics are important for another reason: they'll tell you which sites are sending traffic to your site.

Third, search Facebook. In August, Facebook rolled out a [real-time search engine](#) (the search box is on the top right of any Facebook page). One effective way to take advantage of Facebook search is to search for your company's name to see who is talking about your company and what they're saying. In several months, you'll be able to search Facebook updates directly from Bing () , which will be integrating Facebook public updates into Bing's search results.

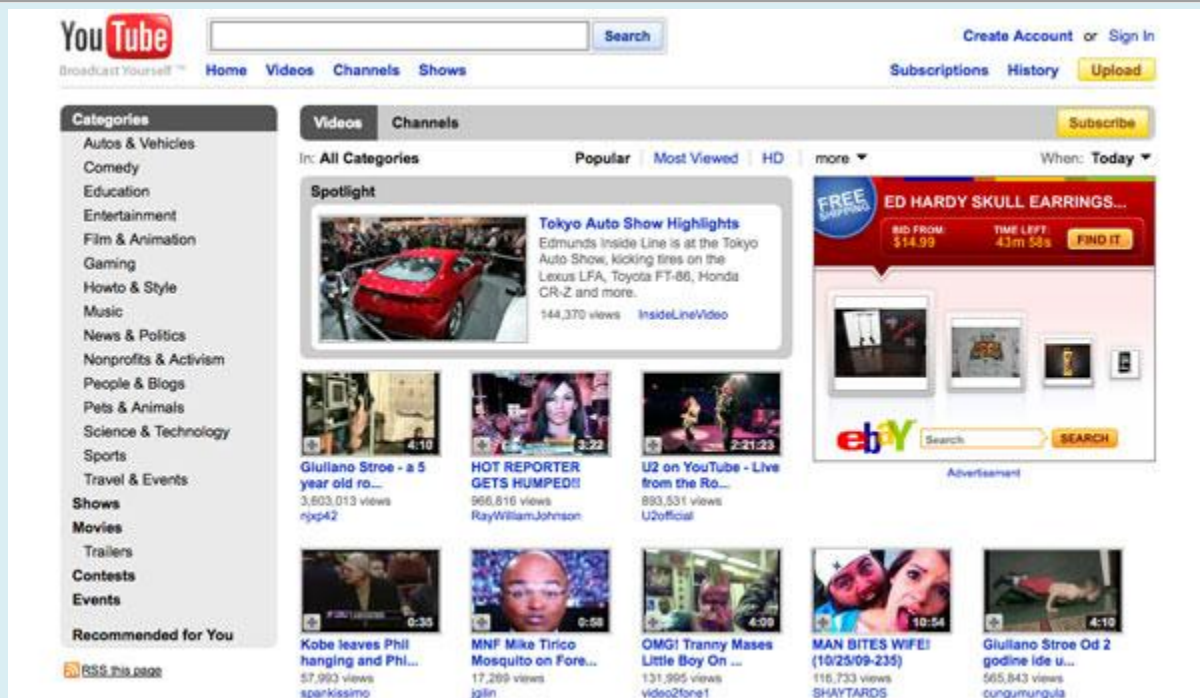
Fourth, search Twitter. You currently can search Twitter for real-time results (if you're not logged in, just go to Twitter's homepage). One easy way to monitor conversations about your company is to search for your company's name. You can also currently do this on Bing, which is [indexing Twitter updates](#). Very soon, you'll also be able to search Twitter updates (and other social media content) via Google's Social Search ([Social Search was rolled out](#) to Google Labs () recently, as an experimental product). You can also use Twitter clients like TweetDeck or Seismic to save searches and monitor in real-time whenever someone uses a specific word or phrase in a tweet.

Finally, take advantage of services that will, similar to Google Alerts, push data to you. I use and like [BackType](#), which is a real-time search engine that indexes online conversations in thousands of blogs and social networks. I use BackType primarily to keep up with conversations in blogs. Every day, I receive emails from BackType with links to comments that include the keywords I'm monitoring. Without these alerts, I would be unable to monitor so many blogs, and my ability to respond to posts about my company would be very limited.

Advanced Strategy: If you're having trouble keeping track of your various search strategies, you should consolidate your efforts and leverage one of the many applications that will help you monitor the social web. I have not personally used these services, but they appear to be held in high esteem by knowledgeable people who have. For example, [truVOICE](#) provides keyword monitoring of the social web with an emphasis on blogs and forums, while [Radian6](#) () pulls in a lot of information from the social web, analyzes it, and provides consumer sentiment ratings for your brand. A good resource to learn about paid social media monitoring tools is Mashable's post [Top 10 Reputation Tracking Tools Worth Paying For](#).

In addition to monitoring, you'll need to decide how, when, and where you'll engage in conversations. It'll be very difficult for you to engage in conversations everywhere, so you should spend some time learning the various networks and deciding where you should focus your efforts. Looking at your website analytics data — if you own an online business — will help a great deal because it'll help you to better understand where your traffic is coming from. If much of your traffic originates from Twitter and Facebook, for example, you'll want to spend more time on those services.

8. Multimedia



Multimedia (video, photos, audio) is a bit more complicated for many small businesses to execute, but can provide excellent social media marketing opportunities.

Basic Strategy: [YouTube](#) (📺) has been constantly evolving and adding features that make it an attractive social site for small businesses. Although you don't have to produce videos to participate on [YouTube](#), you should consider whether simple videos can help your marketing efforts. For example, if you're already posting videos to your blog, you can upload them to YouTube to reach a broader audience, and embed the video content in your blog posts. YouTube has also been adding more comprehensive activity updates for its users and has made pretty powerful analytics tools available so that you can evaluate the effectiveness of your video content.

Similarly, you could start a [Flickr](#) (📷) account for your business and post photos of your customers or your products (or both). Flickr offers a place where people can share photos with others, but also has discussion groups, many focused on local markets, that offer additional opportunities for you to market your business. You can also consider setting up your own Internet radio talk show using [BlogTalkRadio](#), which is another way to use multimedia to speak directly to your customers. Get creative with it — own a restaurant? Start a call-in show for people to ask cooking questions. Are you a piano teacher? Perhaps you could start a show to talk about classical music.

Advanced Strategy: Advanced strategies using multimedia are complicated and typically benefit from using experienced consultants. One effective way to leverage video, for example, is to create content that has the potential to become viral. While I don't believe you can set out to make a viral video (an incredible amount of luck is typically involved), there are a number of things you can typically do to build awareness about your small business using viral video (these strategies are beyond the scope of this post). Once you've created good content, you'll want to distribute it using as many social networks as you can.

When you consider how you can leverage social networks, think about whether each network provides an audience or a technology solution (or both). For example, YouTube provides both a huge audience and a solution for uploading video files. Flickr can also provide both an audience and a technology solution, but not for every business. While your customers might not be on Flickr, you can still use Flickr as a place to store and tag your photos, and then distribute those photos to other social networks where you prefer to invest more time and effort.

9. Maintain Brand Consistency

The screenshot shows the namechk website interface. At the top, there is a search bar with the username 'mycompany' and a 'cancel' button. Below the search bar, there are options to 'Show All (125)' and 'Sort by Rank'. A grid of social media platforms is displayed, each with a status indicating whether the username is 'Available', 'Taken', or 'Maybe'. The platforms include BackType, Badoo, BallType, bebo, Blip.fm, blip.tv, Blogger, brightkite, Buzznet, cm cafemom, Current, DailyMotion, delicious, deviantART, Digg, Disqus, eBay, epinions, Etsy, Facebook, Families.com, Fanpop, Flickr, Fixster, FriendFeed, funnyordie, Gather, Good Reads, Google, hi5, Howcast, Hulu, iLike, ImageShack, Kaboodle, last.fm, LinkedIn, LiveJournal, Livevideo, mixx, Multiply, myLot, MySpace, Netlog, newsvine, ning, photobucket, PictureTrail, Posterous, Propeller, reddit, Shellari, Slide, Squidoo, StumbleUpon, Technorati, ThisNext, tipd, Tribe, tumblr, twitter, UStream, Viddler, Vimeo, Vox, wikipedia, and Xanga.

Platform	Status
BackType	Available
Badoo	Taken
BallType	Available
bebo	Taken
Blip.fm	Available
blip.tv	Available
Blogger	Taken
brightkite	Available
Buzznet	Available
cm cafemom	Available
Current	Available
DailyMotion	Available
delicious	Available
deviantART	Available
Digg	Available
Disqus	Available
eBay	Taken
epinions	Available
Etsy	Taken
Facebook	Maybe
Families.com	Available
Fanpop	Available
Flickr	Available
Fixster	Available
FriendFeed	Available
funnyordie	Available
Gather	Available
Good Reads	Available
Google	Available
hi5	Available
Howcast	Available
Hulu	Available
iLike	Available
ImageShack	Available
Kaboodle	Available
last.fm	Available
LinkedIn	Available
LiveJournal	Available
Livevideo	Available
mixx	Available
Multiply	Taken
myLot	Available
MySpace	Taken
Netlog	Taken
newsvine	Available
ning	Taken
photobucket	Taken
PictureTrail	Available
Posterous	Available
Propeller	Available
reddit	Available
Shellari	Available
Slide	Available
Squidoo	Available
StumbleUpon	Available
Technorati	Available
ThisNext	Available
tipd	Available
Tribe	Available
tumblr	Taken
twitter	Available
UStream	Available
Viddler	Available
Vimeo	Available
Vox	Available
wikipedia	Available
Xanga	Available

We've discussed only a small handful of social networks. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of others, and new ones spring up every day. That means that your customers will have many different ways to find you. But they won't find you if your brand is scattered across social networks using different usernames and profiles. Let's review some strategies for making sure that your brand is consistent across social networks.

Basic Strategy: Usernames and user profiles are already showing up in search results. Do a search for your company’s name on Google right now — if you also have a Twitter account with the same name, odds are pretty good that the Twitter account will appear very high in the search results. This means that having a consistent username across the various social networks is very important. At a minimum, if you haven’t registered your company name on the major networks (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.), you should do that today. For many small businesses, their user accounts on social networks will be the highest ranked pages in search results.

You should also evaluate your email and web presence strategies. For example, are you using a Gmail ([G](#)) email address when you can very easily be using a custom email address with your company name as your domain? Compare: **restaurantname@gmail.com** with **john@restaurantname.com** — which looks more professional? Similarly, are you hosting your blog at WordPress.com instead of on your own custom domain? Little details can make a difference.

Advanced Strategy: Things get a bit more complicated when you consider that there are many different social networks, and it’s tough to predict which of them will become popular and which will fail. Use a service such as [namechk](#) ([N](#)) or [KnowEm](#) to see whether your username is available on dozens of popular social networks and if it’s not, to see which username could be registered across all social networks.

Maintaining name consistency is important, but isn’t enough by itself. You’ll also want to make sure that your brand speaks with a common “voice” across the social networks. This may be easier said than done. Social networks differ in significant ways from one another and present unique challenges for interacting with customers and potential customers on those networks.

Speaking with a common “voice” doesn’t mean that only one person should execute your company’s social media marketing strategy, but it does mean that everyone who speaks on behalf of your company in social media reflects your brand in a consistent way. I recommend you read Shel Israel’s recently published book “[Twitterville](#),” for excellent tips and stories focusing on how large and small businesses can develop a consistent voice in social media.

10. Leverage Combinations of Social Media Tools

One of the best ways for small businesses to leverage social media marketing is to use various social networks in combination with each other.

Basic Strategy: At a minimum, you should do several things today to cross-market across the various social networks you’re most likely already using. Here are three suggestions:

First, [connect your Twitter account to Facebook](#) so that your tweets will appear in your public updates on Facebook. This will let you leverage your time on Twitter to also update your Facebook fans.

Second, [connect your LinkedIn profile to your WordPress blog](#). LinkedIn allows you to publish, in your profile, synopses of the most recent blog posts on your blog. This application will automatically update your LinkedIn profile with your most recent blog posts.

Third, integrate Twitter tools into your blog. I like and use the [TweetMeme retweet button](#) on my blogs to make it easier for users to tweet about the blog posts. I also use the [ShareThis](#) tool to enable readers to quickly share content on multiple social networks.

Advanced Strategy: Advanced strategies require careful planning/execution and appropriate tools. In nearly all cases, your goal is to maximize the value of your content. For example, if you're posting videos on YouTube or [Vimeo \(📺\)](#), you can blog about those videos on your company's blog. Then, you can tweet about the blog posts on Twitter (which I assume is integrated with your Facebook account). This way, you've taken one piece of content and found a way to leverage it across multiple social networks.

You'll also want to consider ways that you can optimize the distribution to multiple social networks at the same time. Leverage tools to help you do this. For example, [Ping.fm \(📺\)](#) lets you update multiple social networks all in one go. Keep in mind that not all social networks will make sense for every business. Learn which networks are best for your business and find ways to leverage combinations of those networks to make your marketing more effective.

Conclusion

Social media marketing can be a phenomenal marketing channel for small businesses. I hope that the strategies I've outlined above provide a starting point for you to explore how you can leverage social media marketing for your small business.

And if you have additional resources to share or other helpful advice that's worked for your small business (or thoughts about things to avoid), please take a minute and leave a comment. We'd love to hear from you.