

16 SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING SOLUTIONS FOR SMALL BUSINESSES



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Social media marketing solutions help businesses launch effective, profitable social media campaigns.

Credit: Social media marketing image via Shutterstock

Social media marketing is an art form, and with the right social media marketing solution, business owners can master it.

Although social media platforms offer their own marketing tools — Twitter targeted ads, Facebook Pages, Google+ Local and Pinterest Promoted Pins, to name a few — social media marketing solutions streamline the process while helping businesses avoid alienating followers. Constantly pushing advertisements and sales copies no longer works on today's increasingly social-media-savvy consumers, which means businesses need to take on a more strategic, relationship-building approach. Here are 16 social media marketing solutions to help you get there.

1. Yodle — Social media automation

This free addition to the established Yodle online marketing service allows clients to establish business profile pages on Facebook as well as automatically update those pages. The service provides an effective presence on Facebook to local businesses — a necessary step when 12 percent of local searches take place on the social network.

2. VerticalResponse — Email and social media marketing in one

This recently rebuilt email and social media marketing platform lets businesses send email marketing campaigns and schedule posts to their social networks from one dashboard, eliminating the need for multiple, separate tools to do their online marketing. VerticalResponse's new drag-and-drop email design editor lets users easily add "follow us" and "share to social" buttons to all their emails, and give their readers additional ways to engage. Businesses also can share a hosted version of their email newsletter to their social networks with one click, and extend the reach of their email message. With these changes comes a new pricing structure, too, including a free plan for small businesses with an email list size of up to 1,000 contacts. Paid packages start at around \$9 a month.

3. Sociota — Multi-account management

Having trouble managing multiple social media accounts? Sociota is a social network management and monitoring platform offering the ability to integrate multiple Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn or Google+ accounts. The platform is easy to use with a drag and drop feature along with other features like real-time management, analytics capabilities and autofollow/DM which all work make Sociota intuitive to use. Sociota is free for individuals and starts at \$10 per month for business packages.

4. gShift — Twitter mining

It's no secret that Twitter is a powerful tool for businesses — but with more than 200 million users, going in blindly is counterproductive for social media marketers. gShift, a web presence analytics software provider, now offers a Social Keyword module that mines Twitter to cut through the clutter. This new tool monitors keywords, influencers, associated terms, hashtags and other relevant data on Twitter in real-time, helping business create highly relevant and engaging content that draw in prospects and customers. The Social Keyword module is included in the SEO Software Package starting at \$99 a month.

5. Pushup Social — Get your own social network

Pushup Social is a plugin that lets businesses easily integrate a social network into their existing websites. Instead of redirecting visitors to external social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, Pushup Social brings fans and customers “home” by letting them engage without leaving your website. They can follow your company and create conversations in a centralized location, enabling you to build and grow your own community on your own turf. Business owners also get more control over specific areas of their network, such as community messages, analytics, advertising, revenue, search engine optimization (SEO) and more. Pushup Social is free for up to 500 social network members. Paid packages for additional members start at \$49 a month. [REVIEWED: Web Hosting Solutions 2014]

6. livecube — Social media engagement for live events

Hashtags aren't always the best solution to maximizing social media engagement during live events. livecube takes the inherent problems with hashtags — misspellings, lack of participation and clunkiness of revisiting tweets — and uses gamification to incentivize and reward participation. It not only provides attendees with a centralized place to find event-related tweets, ideas and connections, but also encourages participation by rewarding users with points, badges and real-life prizes for contributing to discussions. Other features include event management tools that integrate social media, such as speaker scheduling, logistics management, analytics and social networking. Contact livecube to request pricing and a demo.

7. HootSuite — Campaign management and analytics

HootSuite is a social media management dashboard that helps businesses simplify and automate social media marketing campaigns. With HootSuite, users can manage multiple social networks, schedule messages and tweets, analyze social media traffic, track conversions, and measure campaign results — all in one user-friendly dashboard. HootSuite's Social Analytics feature also offers more than 30 report modules — such as Facebook Insights and Google Analytics — to track metrics like top content, likes and shares, follower demographics, traffic sources and more. These features help businesses easily measure reach, increase engagement and maximize visibility across all types of social channels. HootSuite supports a wide range of social networks, including Facebook, Twitter, Google+, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, FourSquare, Tumblr and Flickr. Free HootSuite accounts offer limited features, and paid business packages start at \$8.99 per month. A 30-day free trial is also available.

Editor's Note: Considering hiring a digital marketing firm? If you're looking for information to help you choose the service that is right for you, use the questionnaire below to have our sister site, Buyer Zone, provide you with information from a variety of vendors for free:

8. Offerpop — Ad-based social media marketing

Offerpop is the solution for businesses interested in launching paid advertisement-based social media marketing campaigns. Offerpop works by creating “social layers” that weave social media into different forms of advertising. Using Offerpop, businesses can turn email marketing — as well as paid Web, broadcast and print advertisements — into powerful social media marketing tools. Offerpop uses these nonsocial advertising platforms to increase engagement via hashtag campaigns, contests and promotions on social media channels. Businesses will also gain access to valuable “social data” — such as email addresses, influence, loyalty and interests — to optimize campaigns, grow followers and, ultimately, increase revenue. Offerpop requires either an annual subscription or per-campaign plan for businesses with more than 100 followers. Annual subscriptions start at \$14 per month, and campaign plans start at \$20 per campaign. A 14-day campaign trial is available.

9. LeadSift — Social media lead generation

Each social media platform offers a treasure trove of potential clients and customers. LeadSift takes the guesswork out of finding them and uncovers a world of social media marketing opportunities. LeadSift mines millions of social media conversations, cutting through the noise to deliver relevant, quality leads based on metrics set by users, such as geographic information and keywords. For instance, if you own a flower shop in San Francisco, LeadSift's algorithms will find tweets from users located in San Francisco who are looking to buy flowers, as opposed to just tweeting about flowers in general. You can then initiate engagement, target campaigns and create relationships to turn them into profitable customers. LeadSift offers a seven-day free trial, followed by a \$29.99 monthly fee.

10. Pricing Engine — Cross-platform ad deployment

Advertising on social media can get tedious if you're running a campaign on multiple platforms. Pricing Engine streamlines the process by enabling users to create a single ad and deploy it on multiple social media channels. As a one-stop-shop social media advertising tool for small businesses, Pricing Engine's features include peer benchmarks against competitors, a marketing "report card" to gauge performance and click-through rates, and a customized action plan to help improve campaigns. Pricing Engine offers free basic accounts and paid accounts, with additional features starting at \$29.99 per month.

11. WebiMax — Outsourced social media marketing

If you don't have any social media marketing experience, WebiMax can help. Instead of navigating the fickle social media marketing waters yourself, WebiMax can create and maintain custom campaigns on Facebook, Twitter, Google+, LinkedIn, YouTube, Pinterest, Instagram and other social networks. To ensure an accurate representation of a brand, WebiMax campaigns are strategically crafted and tailored to a specific business and its consumer base. WebiMax also offers website evaluation to determine the best campaign outlets, SEO consulting and analysis, web design, and search engine marketing (SEM). Contact WebiMax for a free consultation and quote.

12. LocalVox — All-in-one social media marketing solution

LocalVox is a social and mobile marketing platform designed for local businesses. To drive in-store sales, LocalVox integrates things like SEO, mobile websites, email marketing, public relations campaigns, advertising and even local directories. The service also lets businesses boost social media reach by claiming profiles on distribution channels and managing their reputation on sites like Yelp, Superpages and CitySearch. LocalVox comes with an easy-to-use dashboard, which includes analytics, to-do lists, metric-based action items and customer management. LocalVox starts at \$99 per month.

13. Custard Media — Go viral

Custard Media is a social media marketing management and distribution tool that goes the extra mile by helping users create videos and making them go viral. The Custard Media team can manage social media marketing campaigns on platforms like Facebook, Twitter and Google+, as well as content-distribution social networks like YouTube, Pinterest, Digg and Reddit. The company also specializes in SEO and pay-per-click (PPC) advertising, which not only drive traffic to a business's website, but also apply to social media marketing campaigns to maximize advertising spend. Other services include social bookmarking, updating social media channels with fresh content, and growing and engaging with followers. Contact Custard Media for a quote.

14. SnapRetail — Your own personal social media copywriter

Social media isn't for everyone, but SnapRetail turns the average small business owner into a social media marketing powerhouse with ready-to-use social media content. The service offers a library with thousands of customizable, prewritten social media posts to choose from, eliminating the difficulty of crafting attention-grabbing updates. Users can drag-and-drop desired posts into social media channels, with the option to use a calendar interface to easily schedule updates. Users can also add some pizzazz to posts via the SnapRetail app, which enables them to take their own photos to complement their posts. SnapRetail offers annual and quarterly plans starting at \$2.75 per day.

15. Social Passport — Rewards and discounts

Social Passport has a different take on social media marketing. As a “360-degree” social marketing platform, Social passport aims to drive traffic to a store, reward its customers, educate business owners about customers and push deals to a targeted demographic — all using social media. It works by enabling customers to use their mobile phones to instantly like a business on Facebook, follow it on Twitter and check in on FourSquare with just a tap, without the fuss of having to open each app. This real-time social networking tool leverages social media channels by spreading the word to customers’ friends and followers as they claim offers and patronize the business. To measure results, Social Passport offers back-end analytics to track campaigns, sales trends and return on investment (ROI). Users can also use the dashboard to create and modify offers, as well as to manage coupons and loyalty cards. Social Passport is free to use. A premium subscription, which starts at \$40 per month, is required to create a branded mobile app.

16. SparkCentral — Social media customer service

Think social media marketing is all about launching campaigns? Customer service on social media platforms can also be a powerful form of marketing by showing the world how much a business values its customers. SparkCentral provides businesses with a social media help-desk platform, allowing them to quickly respond to potential and current customers’ questions and concerns. This real-time engagement both humanizes social media and brings brands closer to leads and followers, helping turn them into loyal customers. SparkCentral’s help-desk features include automated workflow, internal collaboration, engagement metrics, trend identification and personalized communication. Contact SparkCentral to request a demo and pricing.

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