



USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO GENERATE REVENUE

A SIMPLE GUIDE FOR INSURANCE AGENTS

INTRODUCTION

Let's face it: Social media marketing isn't an instinctual skill for most people. Short, pithy posts fly in the face of the long, elegant, grammatically correct language most of us learned in school. Drilling down to the essence of an idea or announcement in only 140 characters can feel difficult or even impossible. And to some people, the whole idea of using social media for business is just downright disingenuous.

That's the bad news. The good news is that, largely in reaction to feelings like this, many people are making an effort to put the relationship back into social media. As a result, it has transformed from a teenage pastime to a viable marketing strategy that you cannot afford to miss out on. Not only can it help you put out the word to your clients and potential customers about important deals, discounts, plans and more, it is an excellent way to make a name for yourself.

Florida insurance agents looking for the inside skinny on social media for small business will find in this guide a wealth of tips, tricks and strategies for building clientele, generating attention and growing the bottom line. But because it is impossible to cover every social media platform, this guide offers a crash course in using the five largest and most important: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+ and Pinterest. But first, the basics.



THE BASICS: KEYWORD RESEARCH

Before you get started with any one social media platform, you've got to get the basics under your belt. No serious **insurance agent lead generation** effort can really take off if you haven't done the legwork of keyword research. You see, social media isn't some mysterious force that only marketing Jedi understand; it's just another online outlet that either will or will not catch the web bots' attention.

CONFUSED? LET'S BREAK THIS DOWN.

Search engines such as Google use complicated pieces of software — variously referred to as web bots, web crawlers, web spiders or other names. This software is responsible for systematically indexing the web, which means taking stock of all web pages, blog or social media posts, and the millions and billions of other odds and ends generated online, and organizing them according to rank and relevance. Although the complicated algorithms that direct this process employ many elements to complete their tasks, one of the most important is the keyword.

A keyword is a word or phrase that a user types into a search box. The results returned by that keyword can make or break businesses. Think about it: If your potential customers type "**Florida home insurance**" into a search box and consistently see your competitor's name pop up instead of yours, you're losing business.

So your first step is to make sure that you're targeting the right keywords — the ones your potential clients are looking for. Your keywords should include, for instance, the type of insurance you sell, where you are located, who your target audience is, and any special information you may want to include. "**Florida home insurance**" might therefore become "southern Florida condominium insurance" or "Key West rental insurance." Do your research using a keyword finder, and choose common search terms. And here's the kicker: Use as many as you want. You're not restricted to just one!

The second step, now that you have your keywords picked out, is to ensure that you use them to capture business currently going to your competitors. You do this by creating relevant content to catch the attention of the web bots. If you create enough good content that people pay attention to, the bots start paying attention, as well, sending even more potential customers your way. It's a virtuous circle.

What kind of content? Well, keyword-rich web pages do the trick. So do blog posts. But what many people don't realize is that social media works, too. By using Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+, Pinterest and other platforms, you can rise through the search engine rankings, build an audience, and generate the kind of revenue that will keep your business strong for years to come.



Originally invented as a way for college students to keep in touch, Facebook has built a massive user base of business owners, celebrities, writers, artists and more. It is a perfect place for you to start a conversation, localize your services, and build a following. What's more, creating a page on Facebook makes you searchable, so potential customers you aren't even aware of can look for and find you. You can also carry on conversations one-on-one with clients and prospects, keep in touch with others in your industry, and serve your existing customers and fans with the kinds of deals and savings that will keep them around, building your business for you. Just remember to sell less and engage your fans more, asking for their opinions and offer valuable information, and you will surely find success with this platform.

HOW TO TURN FACEBOOK FANS INTO CUSTOMERS

One of Facebook's most important functions is the potential to turn existing fans into paying customers. Fans are people who have liked your page and can therefore see your posts in their newsfeeds. While that's great, it may take more than an occasional glance at your posts to convert these people to clients. So how do you do it? Strategies abound, but a few of the most common include offering gift cards or free evaluations to fans only; sharing industry-specific information with your fans that makes you look trustworthy, knowledgeable, or otherwise better than the competition; calling customers out with a story that proves how well you know them (for instance, a worst-case hurricane scenario for beach house owners, explaining why they need home insurance); or using awesome testimonials from prior or existing clients. Remember to use keywords so that your posts also get noticed by the bots.

ENTER THE SPONSORED POST

Of course, even great posts won't always work. Unfortunately, Facebook changes its rules frequently, and the latest rounds have made it much more difficult to meaningfully engage with the wider world without (a) building a huge base first or (b) paying for the privilege of engagement. Now you'll have a harder time reaching even your own community, thanks to Facebook's recent limitations of organic reach, which mean that regular posts get shown to about 16 percent of your fan base, on average.

Instead, if you have something really important to share, you'll need to pay to ensure it reaches a large audience. You can either push it to your fans and their friends, choose to send it only to your pre-existing audience, or choose a different "target" audience composed of the type of people you'd like to reach (ideally those who would become good customers). While it might seem galling to pay for social media, keep in mind that advertising costs have traditionally composed a huge part of any company's budget, and that there's no shame in paying for visibility. If you want to generate revenue on social media, shelling out to reach potential customers can really pay off.



TWITTER

Twitter gets a bad rap as a soulless place where people report what they ate for breakfast and not much else. In today's world, though, that's unfair. Sure, Twitter is a social media platform built on sharing bursts of information composed of only 140 characters or fewer, and coming on the heels of a much-roomier Facebook, it was initially hard for many people to fathom how you could actually cram information (much less a well-rounded marketing message) into this space. But it is a valuable advertising platform that can help you engage with customers, find out what competitors are up to, and broadcast your brand and message.

BUILD A PERSONA IN 140 CHARACTERS OR LESS

In order to use Twitter to generate revenue, either in insurance or any other industry, you must first build a brand persona that people will identify with. Who are these people, you're wondering? They're your potential and existing clients and customers. While you're hoping to convince the first group to work with you, you want to keep the second group happy, continue to meet their needs, and sell them on new products and services.

Because the average tweet is only live for a few seconds, though, you'll need enough followers to stand a good chance of catching the attention of at least a few people. This requires nothing more than sharing great content: articles, factoids, anecdotes, busted myths, jokes — and remember to use keywords to snag the users searching for your product. Keep in mind that you don't have to create everything you share yourself. You can build a great brand persona by sharing content from others, as well, so long as you give them credit. Your followers won't care if much of what you share comes from other sources as long as it is valuable, actionable and related to your overall marketing message.

GREAT DEALS STILL SELL

Now that you have followers, it's time to convert them into customers. As with Facebook, the best way to do this is to offer incentives to work with you or buy your products. Gift cards always work, of course. So do promotions that last only a limited time and create scarcity. Contests, giveaways, free evaluations and announcements of new products or services all do the trick, as well. Use a unique promotional code for each marketing ploy so that you can learn which ones work and which do not. After a while, you will discover which aren't worth it and which consistently generate revenue.



Unlike Facebook and Twitter, which are platforms primarily designed to facilitate connection with your fans, clients, customers and prospects, LinkedIn is designed to hook you into your chosen field. Dubbed the “world’s largest professional network,” LinkedIn is the place to schmooze with colleagues, plug in to the competition, and keep your finger on the pulse of the industry. Best of all, it is relatively simple to get started, requiring only that you translate your resume to the page, put up a picture, and link with your existing professional contacts.

MAKE FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE ON LINKEDIN

LinkedIn is the true watering hole of the social media world — a place where likeminded people can gather, get to know each other, give and receive favors, and generally rub shoulders the old-fashioned way ... online. Your profit-generating strategy on LinkedIn should therefore be longer term, geared toward building a network of professional contacts rather than targeting customers. Look for people in your field who are not direct competitors with whom you can exchange referrals. Good targets for insurance agents are tax professionals, real estate agents, accountants and financial advisors, for example.

LinkedIn is also a great place to keep up with what your competitors are doing. Look up people who are offering the same services you are, either in your area or others, and check out their social media profiles. When you see good strategies in action, try to replicate them in your own marketing efforts. Consider forming relationships with insurance agents who offer the same services you do in a different target market, and then exchange career tips and meet semi-frequently to discuss growth strategies or revenue-generating ideas. You can also build a referral network in other cities or states, so when your customers move, you send them to your contacts. In most cases, the agents who benefit from this will offer you the same service, increasing your customer base and helping you generate revenue.

DON'T FORGET ABOUT APPEARANCES

Fine, so looks aren't everything. But just as you wouldn't attend a networking event wearing your bathrobe and slippers, you shouldn't throw up a shoddy LinkedIn profile and expect great results. Instead, take the time to really build the kind of professional profile that you would want to connect with. Potential business partners, referral sources and colleagues will all be much more likely to approach you with the goal of starting a relationship if they see a polished page with a nice color headshot, a fantastic banner and well-edited copy. Also take the time to give lots of referrals so that people will refer you in turn; social proof is everything online, so don't disregard it.



When Google launched Google+ in 2011, the search engine giant had high hopes for its new social network. Google+ (also known as Google Plus) was designed for networking, marketing, and socializing purpose, and it even came with a built-in user base. Anyone who belonged to another Google service (such as Gmail or YouTube) would automatically have a Google+ page.

Five years and several redesigns later, Facebook and LinkedIn are still the go-to social networks for businesses and consumers. However, Google recently launched one of its most significant redesigns to date. Now, the underused service is a social "interface" with a variety of marketing and multimedia purposes.

FIND NEW CLIENTS WITH COMMUNITIES

Because Google+ is no longer a traditional social network, its newest features capitalize on a non-traditional form of networking. Google+ Communities are designed to enable interactions and discussions between strangers with similar interests, rather than people who already have connections in real life. Engage with people who are likely to need the kind of insurance you sell, and with other businesses that reach local demographics.

Of course, traditional marketing is also still possible. Though Google stopped making Google+ signups automatic in 2015, most of your Gmail and YouTube contacts probably already have pages. And because Google's many properties are so well-integrated, your Google+ page could also reach people who are using Google or Google Maps to search for insurance agents in the area. Build up your list of contacts and boost your online visibility by keeping your page up-to-date and posting plenty of informative, well-organized content.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF GOOGLE METRICS

Google+ also has some marketing and research tools that other social networks don't offer. For example, Google+ Views allows you to track the popularity of your page and individual content posts according to view counts and user activity. Google also offers free and fee-based marketing tools that zero in on the demographics you're reaching (or want to reach), allowing you to better understand your market and cater to their needs.

Google+ Collections is another new and efficient way to share content with specific users, and it integrates the benefits of many Google+ marketing services. The feature allows you to separate your posts, including photos, texts, links, and videos, into different topics. For example, a homeowners insurance company might benefit from a Google+ page with different collections for energy-saving tips, DIY projects, home safety, and other related topics.

You may not be familiar with Google+, but don't count it out just yet. Now that it allows users to zero in on the exact topics they want to discuss, you have more opportunities to fine-tune your marketing strategies and deliver the content your clients and potential clients actually want to see.



INSTAGRAM

More than 400 million people regularly use Instagram, a mobile app and social network with more marketing potential than ever before. The photo-sharing app was once exclusive to iPhone users, who could only share square-shaped images. However, as it continues to evolve, the app's features have become more accommodating and its user base has ballooned to include more potential clients. Make an effort to post high-quality Instagram content that turns views and likes into clicks, emails, and signatures on the dotted line.

STAND OUT WITH AN INSTAGRAM SIGNATURE

Your visual aesthetic should distinguish your Instagram account – and therefore, your business – from others on your clients' phones. Keep your color scheme, editing style, and captions consistent. If your Instagram marketing strategies are successful, your content will be a reflection of the values and demographics that are essential to your brand. Your photos and posting habits will tell others how you do business, and invite them to stay in touch and form a lasting impression of your brand.

Instagram is also a great way to humanize your business, especially if you make an effort to interact with others. Follow other local businesses, reply to comments, and maintain a warm, friendly tone throughout all your captions and social media marketing campaigns. A branded watermark may distract from the casual, impromptu interactions that make Instagram such an effective way to engage with clients and potential clients. However, you may end each caption with the same insurance-related hashtag, and prepare a series of photos and videos that introduce your smiling agents. Post photos of community events and celebrations, not just headshots of employees, to earn trust and increase your likeability and visibility.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF INSTAGRAM ADS

You don't have to rely on your limited pool of followers to make your Instagram posts effective. Instagram finally joined the ranks of Facebook and Twitter in 2015, introducing an advertising option that integrates sponsored posts into live feeds. These posts appear among the other photo posts on a user's feed, but they include additional options and are distinguished by a subtle "Sponsored" tag at the top right. You may pay to promote a photo, video, or "carousel" of multiple images, and all formats support a "learn more" button that links directly to your professional website.

This is important, because Instagram captions cannot contain hyperlinks. Unless you pay for Instagram Ads, the only way to prompt direct action is to encourage users to click the link in your account bio, or expect them to copy and paste URLs from your captions. Of course, sponsored Instagram posts also reach a much broader audience. Even if you attract hundreds of followers with hashtags that connect your posts to the local community, there are still thousands of other potential clients who may only follow their friends and family members. Sponsored posts increase your online visibility and ensure that more people are aware of your brand and exposed to your calls-to-action.

THAT'S ALL FOLKS!

Believe it or not, using social media for business is a strategy that is far from saturated. Even though the big names have been milking these online platforms for years, lots of people have yet to jump on board. Many, if not most, of your competitors still haven't gotten their acts together whereas almost all of your potential clients are actively using social media to look for **Florida insurance agents** just like you.

This presents a rare opportunity. New technologies always reward those who adopt them earlier rather than later, so building your profiles and using them to bolster your business will help you stand out from the masses and attract the people you want to work with. And although you may feel overwhelmed at first, it's important to remind yourself that this is just another skill to learn. By keeping your customers in mind, aiming for genuine relationships, and focusing on one step at a time, you can turn brand-new social media accounts into useful, keyword-rich communities around which your ideal business community can grow for life.

