



CLIMBING THE SOCIAL LADDER

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A strong social media presence helps you meet consumers where they're at, keeping your shop top of mind when their bikes are due for upgrades or tune-ups.

In the early days of the internet, no one could have predicted the impact that it would eventually have on our daily lives — and we're not just talking about cat videos here. Paying bills, shopping, going to school, booking travel: everything's online, and it should come as no surprise that many of your customers are in for the ride. But what if we told you there's an easy way to use the internet to draw them away from their screens and into your store?

We're talking, of course, about social media.

Social media is proven ground for brands to connect and engage with their customers. A 2015 Global Web Index study showed that the average internet user spends 28% of their online time on social media. A study from the same organization saw this figure jump to 30% in June 2016. While a 2% increase in social media visits might not seem huge, it's actually quite telling — and it's quite likely that percentage will only go up.

InstaTwitBook – Finding Your Social Networks

The world of social media is ever-evolving and sometimes it feels like you can't keep up. As new networks pop up (hello Snapchat), old ones fall to the way side (goodbye MySpace), while existing ones bolster their features (Instagram Video, anyone?). Determining where your brand should be playing may seem a bit overwhelming. Let's break down the most popular ones, shall we?

Facebook

Of all the social media networks out there, Facebook is by far the most popular and most robust in terms of features. It's easy to use and gives you the ability to post photo albums, host and share events, broadcast live videos, and write in longer form. Add in the power to target posts to specific groups and Facebook will quickly become your go-to social network — for a price, that is.

The major drawback with Facebook is its pay-to-play format. A few years ago, unpaid distribution was king, and brands were able to reach large audiences simply by sharing a post. Facebook realized there was good money to be made by limiting the organic reach of these posts, so they started adding promoted posts and targeted ads. Today, the organic reach on Facebook is almost nonexistent, so if you're going to be active on it, be sure to work in some extra money in the marketing budget for promotions.

Instagram

With over 300 million users and counting, Instagram is on the rise. What started out as an independent photo sharing network was later purchased by Facebook for an exorbitant amount of money. The behemoth quickly turned Instagram into a unique and powerful marketing tool, ideal for brands on a budget looking to connect with their audiences on a more personal – and visual – level.

Instagram may not be quite as robust as Facebook, but there are still plenty of ways for brands to have massive success engaging customers on the platform. While some tactics are straightforward, like sponsored posts via the Facebook Ads Manager, others require a little more creativity, such as photo contests and branded hashtags.

Instagram recently launched a timeline-based algorithm similar to that of Facebook, meaning it decides what content it thinks users want to see. This has some social media marketers worried that Instagram will soon be pay-to-play like its big brother Facebook. For the time being however, Instagram is a mandatory network for brands looking to maximize their organic reach.

Twitter

Twitter is a place for brands to have conversations with their fans and customers. It's without a doubt the best network to engage your audience (provided your audience is active on the platform, that is.) It's true that Twitter has seen a slight decline in usage over the past couple years, but don't let that deter you from exploring it. Twitter has a much, much better organic reach than the likes of Facebook — meaning it's a low-cost investment for your brand.

Tweets are currently limited to 140 characters, so be sure to really think about what you want to say and how you want to say it. Rumor has it that Twitter is planning on expanding this and possible even doing away with the character count all together. For the time being, however, you'll have to master the art of brevity.

It should be noted that Twitter was a pioneer in the world of social media marketing. With its implementation of the hashtag (uh, that's the “#” symbol that you've likely seen floating around the web), it unleashed upon the world the most useful tool for brands to engage and unite audiences. Additionally, the hashtag has been implemented on most other social networks as a way to organize related content.

Tumblr

Tumblr is a great option if you want to add a low-cost and user-friendly blog into your social media marketing. With an endless offering of fully-customizable templates, it can really help to set your brand apart. Post photos, embed videos, write blog posts, share product reviews... you name it, you can probably do it on Tumblr.

Facebook	Instagram	Twitter	Tumblr
Great For: Most things—events, videos, links, etc.	Great For: Photos & short videos	Great For: Organic reach, more frequent interaction & brevity	Great For: Versatility & blogging
Main Drawback: Pay-to-play	Main Drawback: Declining organic reach	Main Drawback: Declining audience & character limit	Main Drawback: Blogging can be time consuming

The Basics

So, you've decided what networks are right for your shop and have taken the necessary steps to set them up. Now what? Simple:

1. Set Goals
2. Choose a Social Media Manager
3. Create a Content Calendar
4. Curate and Post Content
5. Engage
6. Track Results

Now, We Plan

Before you do anything on social media, it's important to have a plan. Ask yourself three important questions before you get started:

- **What goals are you trying to achieve?** Are you trying to raise awareness about your shop? Or are you hoping to increase engagement with your existing customers?
- **What are you trying to promote?** Does your shop put on events? Sales? Demos? What about product reviews to entice people to come and see a dynamic new product in person?
- **Who are you trying to reach?** What does your core audience look like? What do they care about? What will appeal to them and keep you in mind when it comes time to buy? Do you already have a loyal following of customers? What networks do they use?

How you answer these questions will dictate much of the content that you post. And while we're on the subject of content...

Who's in Charge Here?

Determine up front who is going to be responsible for your shop's social media networks. Having one person in charge and in control of the content calendar will keep things running smoothly and will keep from any overlap in posts or inconsistencies in messaging. This doesn't mean that that person should be the only one responsible for content, though. Remember it's social media. Get the mechanics and sales people involved in curating and creating content and you'll not only ease the stress of your social media manager, you'll also end up with a lot more unique content and a richer community of voices.

Throw It On the Calendar

After you've determined some of your goals and who you'll be reaching with your posts, it's time to start planning out your content calendar. This might seem like a daunting task, but rest assured it's not as hard as it seems. As with anything, it's best to start small. Try planning out a week's worth of posts.

As a general guideline for each network, best practices for frequency of posts is as follows:

- **Facebook** — 3–5 times per week
- **Instagram** — Once daily
- **Twitter** — 1–2 times per day
- **Tumblr** — 1–2 times per week

After you have that first week planned out, see how it goes. Did things go well or did you find yourself with not enough content? Try another week. Keep scheduling week by week until you feel confident enough to schedule out two weeks. Eventually, you'll be able to schedule out your entire year. Well, sort of.

It's unrealistic to try and plan out an entire year's worth of posts across multiple social networks. What you can do, however, is make note of things you know will be coming up throughout the year. Are you planning a demo event in a few months? Throw it on the social media calendar. Interbike and other industry tradeshows? Calendar. Annual sale? Calendar. By planning out the big stuff in advance, you can keep a broad perspective of the year and plan for gaps in content. This also allows for some posting flexibility when yet another bottom bracket standard is introduced.

It should be noted that planning your yearly social media calendar is best kept for the off-season so it doesn't interfere with your time on the floor with customers.

Stick to the Plan (But Be A Little Flexible)

After you have a content calendar in place, it's important to stick with it as much possible. Otherwise the time you put into it ends up being a waste, and we all know what that does to a small business's bottom line. However, as discussed earlier, your plan should have some flexibility built in to accommodate things that are sure to come up throughout the year — such as product launches, reviews, and photo-worthy bike builds.

Content Is Key

You may have heard the phrase “Content is Key” before. In fact, you may have heard it a lot. So much so that it's lost a lot of its meaning. In terms of social media, however, content really is key. The information you choose to post should have purpose and here's why: regular posting doesn't always equate to high engagement and can even lead to reader fatigue. What really ensures success is creating (or providing links to) rich content that people actually want to engage with. The most important thing to keep in mind when curating content is to keep it authentic.

- **Does your shop do a lot of really beautiful, high-end builds?** Show them off! Utilize the hashtag #baaw (that's “bike against a wall”) to maximize the exposure. Consider having a “bike build of the week” post to add some consistency to your social feed.
- **Do you host demo events?** Social media is a great way to get the word out about demo events your shop is hosting. Post flyers, create event pages, and build excitement leading up to the event. Be sure and take lots of photos to post during and after showing how successful your demos are. This will help drum up buzz for your next event.
- **Do you attend industry tradeshows?** Before you head to Frostbike, Interbike, Eurobike, or Sea Otter, formalize your social media strategy around the event. If you can be a go-to source for all the latest product launches happening at those events for your customers, chances are you'll also be the go-to source when those products come in stock too.
- **Is that product you posted about at Interbike finally coming into stock?** Keep the buzz about product launches going by posting media reviews shortly before it's due to be available. Let customers know exactly when you expect to have it in stock or let them know if they can pre-order it.
- **Are you having a big sale?** Promote it on social media. An easy way to see how effective you're being on your social media promotion is by having early bird specials that you only promote via your social channels. Post about it and see how many people show up.
- **Follow the brands you carry and share their content.** If you're not reposting content from your best-selling brands, you're missing out on some great, free marketing. Chances are the brands you have in your store have a pretty healthy marketing budget to put towards rich video content, elaborate product launches, and pro sponsorships. Ride the coattails of their investment and share this content as it fits in with your social strategy.

These are obviously just a few of the ways you can generate engaging content and you'll likely find plenty of other avenues. And remember, the purpose of posting engaging content is for your customers to want to engage with it so don't let their comments fall on deaf ears. Engagement is a two-way street so be sure and keep the conversation going with your audience. This creates a lasting impression of your brand in their minds and will keep you top of mind for all their bike needs.

Avoidable Mistakes

You probably have your own personal social media accounts and you probably follow a number of your favorite brands, organizations, and public figures. You've also probably noticed that some of those accounts occasionally — or maybe even regularly — make some pretty big social media faux pas (just ask Anthony Weiner.) Here are some tips and reminders so you can avoid being one of those brands.

You Gotta Keep 'Em Separated

Most social networks these days have the ability to link to other social channels. The thinking behind this is that you only have to post once and can “push” it to all of the other platforms you engage with. Sounds pretty convenient, right? Wrong.

In some cases, it's fine. Pushing Instagram photos straight to Tumblr is no problem — the post carries any hashtags with it and automatically puts it onto your Tumblr page.

Pushing Instagram photos to Facebook, on the other hand, is entirely different and not nearly as effective.

Facebook wants you to post content natively within Facebook. So much so that they actually prioritize native content in newsfeeds over something pushed from another social network. If you push a photo from Instagram and post the exact same photo natively, Facebook will put the native photo in front of more people every time. You'll also encounter this favoritism if you share a YouTube link vs. uploading the same video directly to Facebook.

Overall, it's just best to avoid linking your social media accounts and simply post everything individually. That little bit of extra effort will pay off in the long run.

If It Seems Like a PR Nightmare, It Probably Is

“Did you see what [insert brand] just posted. How could they think that was a good idea?! I guess I won't be buying their stuff anymore.”

Those words seem to be uttered on a shockingly regular basis. Thankfully, there's a pretty straightforward and easy way to avoid it being said about your brand. Think about your content and ask yourself:

- Could it be perceived as offensive?
- Are you using a scantily-clad woman to try and further your business?
- Will your post make a certain group of people feel uncomfortable?
- Does it exploit or make a joke about an underrepresented group?
- Does it appropriate anyone's culture?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, we have some advice for you: don't post it. At a time when so many underrepresented groups are making their voices heard in the bike industry, there's absolutely no excuse to further alienate them.

Don't Feed the Trolls

When you start marketing your brand on social media, one thing is unfortunately inevitable: trolls. These are the people that will say something negative about your brand, your product, other posters, etc. simply to get a rise out of you or call attention to themselves or just because they can. There are two schools of thought as to how to handle these mischief makers:

One is to monitor your page and keep any eye out for these types of comments and hide them or delete them as you see fit. This can take some time depending on how many trolls you encounter, but can be effective in maintaining a good public-facing image. Ultimately, your brand — and its social media channels — belong to you, so you are in control of what you want your audience to see and read about it.

The other is to leave the comments on your page. People are entitled to their opinions, and leaving comments unvarnished may send a signal that you value what people think about your brand regardless of positive or negative feedback. Rather than the highly-curated and scrubbed-cleaning feeling that comes with a heavily-redacted comments section featuring only 5-star reviews, a hands-off attitude can make your page feel authentic and genuine.

Regardless of how you handle trolls, it's a smart idea to at least hide or delete comments that may cause the aforementioned PR nightmare. This includes but is not limited to: sexism, racism, homophobia, or vulgar language.

The Results Are In

As you post content, you may be wondering how to tell if you're being successful in your social media marketing. The answer to that lies in analytics. Tracking results on social media is just as important as the content itself. Not only does it show success, it can also provides insights into the behavior patterns of your audience.

- What day of the week or time of day are you experiencing the most interaction?
- What type of content resonates the most with your audience?
- What content falls flat?
- What are the demographics of your audience?

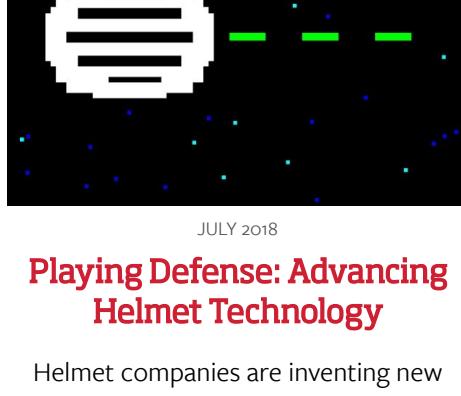
Analytics will help you answer these questions and more so you can better pinpoint the type of content that your audience wants to see. But how do you actually get this information? Many social media networks have some basic built-in tools, with Facebook's being the most robust. These tools, however, don't always provide a big picture look at your analytics. Investing in third-party software like Sprout Social or Hootsuite is the best bet to tracking your success.

With social media, it's important to remember that it is constantly evolving. It's a world based on trends, so by definition what's popular and working today might not be tomorrow or next week. The goal — and the trickiest part — is to stay ahead of those trends as best as possible and constantly be adapting. Keep in mind that not everything is going to knock it out of the park. As with anything, there's a learning curve. Think back to the first time you rode with clipless pedals. Chances are you had a few wobbly starts and probably even tipped over a time or two. But you picked yourself up, dusted yourself off, and learned from your mistakes to become a better rider. It's the same with social media. Learn from what didn't work and use it to become a better marketer.

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