

Make Social Media

Work for You



Six tips for using Facebook and other sites to boost sales.

When you were hired as a bridal consultant, you likely envisioned a somewhat fairytale idea of what it would be like: Greeting the joyful bride when she walked through the door; positioning yourself as the expert while carefully guiding her through racks of gorgeous gowns; becoming her confidant as you learned all about her romantic engagement and marriage dreams; even tending to her wedding worries, which you'd magically make disappear with heartfelt yet pragmatic solutions.

Enter social media. It's far from romantic – it's technology after all! Yet in today's world of Facebook, Twitter and other such

Social-media use increases profits for most salespeople.

online platforms, it's part of life. And it's part of work, too, particularly for many successful salespeople who have learned how to harness its power.

In fact, research from social sales specialist Jim Keenen shows that social-media use increases sales profits. Referencing his study, a 2013 *Forbes* article points out that 78.6 percent of salespeople using social media outperformed those who weren't. What's more, "Keenen found that when it came to exceeding

sales quota (exceeding quota by more than 10%), social-media users were 23% more successful than their non-social media peers."

Nearly four years later, does that finding still ring true? Absolutely, according to Chris Lott, a national sales team strategist, trainer and author of "*Salesblog*" and the "*totallysales™*" playbook (www.lottspace.com).

"The more participants are talking about the company, its offerings, customer service level, etc., on social media, the better the web-driven lead volume becomes," Lott says. "The better the lead volume, the higher the sales. It's definitely important to the bottom line."



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Yet the average salesperson isn't using social media to his or her advantage. Why? In bridal, this may be due to the fact that your boss hasn't given you those particular responsibilities. But usually for salespeople in general, "this comes from a lack of understanding of how to use social media as a marketing tool in general," Lott says.

Sure, you may know how to maneuver your way around Facebook or other platforms supported by the bridal store. But you may not know how to capitalize on their power – when to use them, what to post, how to engage people effectively, and how to get them to come into the store. There's a lot to learn.

If you're feeling overwhelmed, you're not alone. Pointing to the study, approximately 75 percent of the salespeople surveyed hadn't received any formal social-media training. If that sounds like you, know that other sales consultants are in your shoes, likely figuring things out by trial and error. To help expedite that process, here are six pointers on how to make social media work for you:



1. Professionalize your profile. Just like meeting someone in person, you never get a second chance to make a first impression online. So make sure any relevant social-media profiles look professional.

All aspects of your social-media profile should reflect professionalism.

How? Start by including aspects of your background, skills and interests as they pertain to your job in bridal retail. For instance, what's important for people to immediately know about you? What will make them like you? Feel more inclined to trust you? What will likely matter to brides and other customers? Perhaps it will be your degree in fashion merchandising or previous sales experience or all the community volunteering you do.

Whatever you include on your profile, keep it interesting, short and sweet. As Lott says, make sure you're "being credible without being braggadocious."

Your profile picture, too, should reflect professionalism. It doesn't have to be formal but should be good quality, friendly and clearly look like you. When someone comes into the store, they should be able to spot you without any awkward pause. So when selecting a photo remain authentic to who you are and what you look like.

Don't have a great picture?

The Case for Consultants Participating in the Store's Social Media

It's inexpensive marketing. If you're looking to suggest budget-conscious marketing methods, growing contacts and generating leads online is a proven, often high-value strategy that doesn't cost a lot of money. The key is to get some solid training around this topic.



It's a critical networking tool. All sales associates must network to cultivate relationships and solid leads. While networking in person remains effective, online networking is an integral part of doing business today.

It's a way to communicate value. As you provide relevant information to contacts or potential customers, you become an asset in their eyes. As you become of value to them, you up the odds you'll help your sales and the store's bottom line. This looks and feels good to your customers and boss, making it a win-win for all!

It's a skillset anyone in sales needs. Not that you're thinking of leaving your current job, but having the ability to effectively cultivate and convert leads through social-media skills is a huge feather in your career hat.

It's a truer reflection of the store's brand. Think of social media as a mini-representation of the store experience and culture. If only the boss is posting online, people get a very limited view of all the talented people who work there and help make the store what it really is. So participating in social media is sort of like showing up at the store and doing your job. But in this case, you're just being "present" and performing online. (As a bonus: When you help your boss with the job of social-media posting, this frees her/him up to do more leadership-centric tasks, which is always a huge plus in any great boss's mind!)

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Success is about what you do on social media, not how much time you spend there.

tacts are writing, and what's going to be of value to them in terms of your posts.



2. Scrutinize your social-media time. Think about your typical week and decide when you want to spend time on the store's social-media platforms. This is important because without a plan it's easy to get sucked into these sites and waste hours doing something irrelevant to your goals.

What's more, you actually don't need to spend a ton of time on these social-media platforms, according to Keenan's research. As highlighted in that *Forbes'* article, "78% of Salespeople Using Social Media Outsell Their Peers," about half of the people using social media to create and close sales spend less than 10 percent of their selling time on social media. So success is more about what you're doing while you're on social media, not how much time you're spending hanging out on the platforms.

The takeaway? Be purposeful here, perhaps even scheduling into your calendar exactly when you'll focus on this task. Then when you're there, make the best of it by staying focused on the store/brand, what your con-

3. Establish a plan. You don't want to just jump aboard your store's social-media platforms and post haphazardly. Rather your goal is to become a trusted source of information online that will encourage customers to walk into the store and buy from you.

So set aside some time to create a plan for how you'll address your discipline around social-media sales, establishing goals and strategies just like you would with in-person sales. If you want to be seen as a leading expert in trends, you'll need to figure out how to do that. . . posting pictures – with every post? Blogging about it – how often? Providing a weekly fashion tip of the day – always at noon?

Once you determine such strategies for that or any other vital goals, figure out what supporting resources you'll need. If you're set on covering bridal trends for the store, make sure you've got a stockpile of gown photos, celebrities showing off the latest looks, and other support materials. Use these to show, not just tell, what you

know, reinforcing that credibility factor.

Also, as best you can, think about "planning" relative to creating and growing your contacts. You'll likely want your current brides on your list but what about partners, media, key influencers and friends in the community? As Lott says, "Consultants will need a plan of whom they want as contacts. This is very important so to not get totally overwhelmed. Then, start the invites."



4. Eat, sleep, breathe "engagement." This doesn't mean marriage proposals but rather how you build relationships through little tricks of the social sales trade. If you're wanting to boost social-media engagement, Google the topic and do your due diligence, finding strategies that speak to you and make sense for your audience.

One good engagement strategy might include tagging in 80 percent of your posts so to spark responses, likes, shares and such from those who are being tagged. Another might be opting for video posts more so than pictures, during which you can, again, show brides something educational (how to tie the corset) or entertaining (the moment an emotional bride says "Yes!" to the dress). Finally, another

er might be sharing others' content, for example, the latest news from the biggest name in wedding gown design, smart tips from a local vendor/partner in your industry, or a recipe that's great for engagement party cocktails – and that you've personally tried!



5. Steer clear of spam. Blasting your contacts with irrelevant information or posting canned material that feels pushy or unauthentic will undermine your credibility.

Additionally spamming is the epitome of poor social-media etiquette.

“This is very tempting with social media because it is easy to do. . . but when contacting a potential customer or an existing customer, always have a legitimate reason for doing so,” Lott says. “Continually hammering someone over and over again is the surest way to drive them away.”

On the flip side, say you know a few prospective brides love a particular designer and that very designer just booked a trunk show with the store. Now that's a good reason to reach out to these contacts through Messenger, for example, or tag them in a promotional post announcing the upcoming event.

Spamming is the epitome of poor social-media etiquette.

6. Learn the power of a pause.

When it comes to social media or any other kind of online communications, remember that once you've hit “post” or “send,” the message is out there for all to see.

Even though you can often go back and edit or delete a post, mistakes can also be captured via screen shot and shared long after you've pulled down or altered whatever was originally pub-



lished. So before you post, always pause and consider whether what you're doing provides clear value to your audience and the store you represent. If it doesn't, don't publish it.

Using Personal Social Media For Work Purposes: Yay or Nay?

Verdict: It's probably a yay – assuming your boss gives you the OK. But it may not be that effective in terms of a sales strategy.

After all, your personal contacts aren't your target selling audience. Make the mistake of assuming they are and this faux-pas could really annoy your friends and family members, making them less likely to refer you in the future.

Why? Because to friends and family, this sales strategy might simply feel too pushy, even offensive at times—and that's the opposite of what you want to communicate about your value as a professional, not to mention as a family member or a friend.

As Chris Lott of Salesblog! (<http://www.lottspace.com>) says, “I have been known to ask for help on my personal sites in an effort to gain leads, such as saying, ‘Do you know anyone who could value from. . .’ If done sparingly, it can be a lead resource from friends and family.”

Lott continues, “In general, I'm not a fan of using personal social-media venues for sales-lead generation. And I don't sell to them directly. But note: Because they are aware of what I do, I become a resource or consultant to family and friends. For example, it's always painful when I find my best friend bought elsewhere because he or she didn't know what I offered. It can be as simple as that person thinking my products were the top-of-the-line only and yet could only afford the middle-of-the-line products. Again, make sure friends and family understand what you offer in a resource/consultant tone.”

