

# ANALYSIS

## THE SECRET TO SOCIAL SELLING

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## Introduction

While social media has not been around for the internet's entire existence, it came onto the scene like a tidal wave, changing the landscape of the world wide web forever. High schools certainly didn't have a ready curriculum on understanding and using it, let alone the sociological or psychological ramifications of every person and entity having access to a public platform. In the years since its inception, though, social media has been wielded to create and bolster careers, maintain relationships, and share essential information and content that benefits a broader audience.

As a direct result of social media, social selling is on the rise. Not to be confused with more common social media activities like photo albums and memes, social selling involves connecting and leveraging your networks to grow your brand and business. In today's online world, long-term success requires setting up a proper online network. Salespeople who incorporate social selling into their strategies consistently outperform those who do not. The truth is that your customers and prospects are likely already hanging out on social media, and they won't be able to find you or your company if you're not there too.

Social selling requires a mindset that goes beyond merely setting up a profile and sending an occasional connection request. For some, the mere commitment associated with adding a social media component to their sales strategy is often a stop-gap that holds salespeople off from using social media to promote their brand. In addition, many people consider it difficult if not impossible to gather valuable metrics that ensure a proper return on investment. This article explores why social selling is important, what it looks like, and strategies for developing and sustaining a working system.

## The Process of Social Selling

Before you launch your social selling efforts, you must set reasonable goals for yourself. According to the 2020 Global Web Index Social Media Report, the average social media user has accounts across eight or more platforms. In addition, odds are good that each of these platforms are used for different purposes. For example, Facebook is often used to keep in touch with friends or handle business-to-consumer relationships. Meanwhile, Instagram might be used for fun, Twitter might be used for news, and LinkedIn might be used for business. Without a proper plan, it's easy to dilute your efforts and spread yourself too thin with random, inconsistent activities.

Achieving growth with any type of sales strategy involves understanding what your best customer looks like, determining where they gain their knowledge, and learning what influences their business decisions. Social selling is no different—when it comes to prospects and customers you must understand where and how those customers are most likely to interact with you or your company. Are your desired prospects and must-keep customers



involved in relevant groups on Facebook or LinkedIn? Are there questions they have posted on Twitter that you could address? Perhaps they are extremely visual thinkers and depend on Instagram or Pinterest to share and generate new ideas. Once you have a solid understanding of where to devote your time, it's easier to define your goals and ensure that your efforts are well-rewarded.

### Setting Meaningful Goals

Social selling offers much more than simply advertising your products and services across online media platforms, and it's not a short road to sales and profits, in fact, selling on social media platforms is sometimes frowned upon. Astute sales professionals will quickly learn that social selling involves developing relationships with the desired audience, staying engaged, and demonstrating brand value. The best way to do this is to center your posts and activities on the customer and their needs rather than your own individual success.

Goals for success might include gaining referrals from delighted customers, posting meaningful content two or three times a week (to build awareness), and even increasing the number of conversations you have online. Goals that are solely centered upon gaining more contacts (or even worse, closing deals) will likely have a negative impact on your efforts-to-results ratio.

### Leveraging the Platform's Intent

Each social media app has a different design in terms of how users participate. Here are some specific examples:

- ◆ Currently the largest social media site in the world, **Facebook** is an excellent platform for brands to market their products to a huge audience and is especially well-suited for business-to-consumer interactions.
- ◆ **Twitter** is an excellent search engine that enables its highly engaged users to stay on top of trending topics and engage in relevant conversations.
- ◆ A widely popular platform for the business-to-business market, **LinkedIn** encourages its participants to expand their professional connections on the platform, showcase industry insights, and build communities.
- ◆ Originally developed as an app to upload and share videos, **YouTube** is now an excellent platform for grabbing the attention of new prospects and supporting existing customers.

Of course, this is by no means an exhaustive list—there are another 90+ social media platforms, and each one exists to address a specific audience and its interests. Once you've identified the sites where your prospects and customers are most likely to hang out, it's time to start thinking about what to post.



## Content Isn't Just for Marketers!

In the ever-expanding ocean that is the internet, two nebulous words have shone as guiding stars to navigate the sea of social media: **content** and **algorithms**. You may have noticed that your Twitter or Facebook news feeds don't show every post by every person you're connected with, and sometimes the content isn't in chronological order. Instead, your news feeds will typically show the people you engage most with at the top, or the most relevant posts will include keywords related to topics you've previously talked about. What you're seeing is almighty algorithms at work. Each platform has its own set of rules and operations, and these are evolving all the time. Even so, the persistent case across all of them is that they favor posters who offer a steady and consistent diet of content.

So what exactly is content? It can be anything, really—an article, a podcast, a graph, or a survey. Successfully sharing content involves ensuring that it benefits your audience and is aligned with your business purpose. Search engines on social media enable you to sift through posts and collect data on hot topics and frequently asked questions. These gems will often reveal important and relevant pain points that your customers and prospects are working to fix. The content you share on social media can become highly valuable if it contains data or information that addresses your followers' known problems. In addition to making your business a viable source of information, this strategy can expedite the process by pre-addressing the common questions your firm receives.

Curating content that pleases algorithms relies heavily on two features, namely **hashtags** and **Search Engine Optimization (SEO)**. Hashtags (#) are often used across multiple social media applications to index keywords or topics so they become visible to a wider audience. Using relevant and popular hashtags when you post will attract people who are already interested in that specific subject. Thankfully, sites like Twitter, LinkedIn, and Facebook make it easy to see what is currently trending on a national and local basis.

SEO is a vastly more complicated topic—the chess to the checkers of hashtags. In short, SEO is the practice of increasing the quality and quantity of traffic to your desired site by making it search engine friendly. There are many factors involved with the specific algorithms that each site uses to rank its results, including engagement, traffic to your site, social relevance (has your company been in the news?), and exact or partial keyword matching. Optimization requires research, time, and care. The good news for social sellers is that much of the work has already been done for you. Many of the best practices and habits discussed in this article go hand-in-hand with an effective SEO strategy.

## Timing is Everything

The specific points in time during which you engage on social media can make a difference. When setting out to anchor your efforts with social selling, one best practice involves setting a proper cadence for your content. You don't want to flood your intended



audience with content all at once, because this will give the impression of spamming. On the other hand, you don't want to spread your engagement too thin because your audience members might then seek a more reliable, consistent source.

Keep an eye on high traffic times and post when the people you want to connect with are likely to be browsing their news feeds. Applications like Hootsuite enable you to create posts ahead of time and then distribute them periodically on multiple social media sites. This makes it easy to develop a comfortable cadence and maintain a steady stream of content.

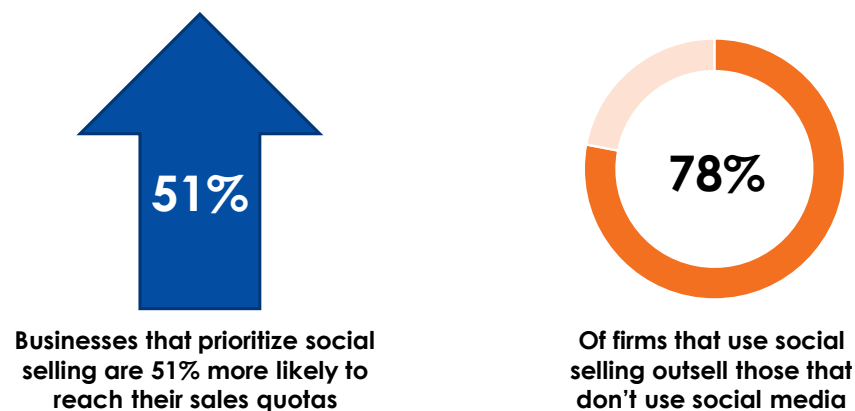
### Measuring Success

Because there are an overwhelming number of statistics that can be tracked on social media, it's easy to focus on the wrong ones. You might be tempted to compare your contact count to your comment count for any single post, but this can be misleading because it focuses on a small piece of the much larger picture. To collect meaningful metrics, start by asking yourself the following questions:

- ◆ Are you being seen by the audience you want to engage and connect with?
- ◆ Are you asking for introductions or referrals that might otherwise be difficult to achieve without leveraging the vast amount of data included in each platform?
- ◆ Are you strengthening your position as an industry thought leader?
- ◆ Are you generating leads?

If you still aren't convinced about the value of social selling, data from the LinkedIn Sales Solutions Report might change your mind.

Figure 1: Social Selling Statistics



Data Source: LinkedIn Sales Solutions Report; Chart created by Keypoint Intelligence



The last thing you probably want is yet another spreadsheet to track your progress. Thankfully, many popular social media applications have built-in utilities that can help you measure engagement levels, profile visits, link clicks, and more.

Social media is not a sales process—the various platforms are simply tools that are designed to aid your well-practiced sales skills and enable success. Consider the characteristics of highly successful salespeople... they are thought leaders, bring new ideas to the table, teach and engage, build relationships, and come properly prepared. The key strategies aren't so different when it comes to social selling. Although the territory, opportunity, or customer list may look and feel a bit unconventional when viewed on a platform, the core staples of sales etiquette, a meaningful dialogue, and a customer-first approach remain the same.

### **The Bottom Line**

Due to the sheer volume of individuals and businesses that are currently using social media, social selling is more than just a buzzword. It is one of today's answers to opening doors and developing meaningful, lasting relationships. When done correctly, it builds your brand and credibility, provides the opportunity to foster loyalty with existing customers, and enables you to engage in ways that e-mail and voicemail messages cannot. If you're seeking a way to get to know your customers and prospects on a more personal level and better understand how your products and services can address the issues they face, get started with a social selling plan!

opinion



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As Director of Business Development Strategies at Keypoint Intelligence, Karen Kimerer has experienced the many challenges of expanding current market opportunities and securing new business. She has developed a systematic approach to these opportunities, addressing the unique requirements of becoming a leader in our changing industry.

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