



Article 335

March 2, 2014

Rules of Engagement: Start With Plan for Social Media Outreach

By Kristelle Siarza, *Online Account Executive, The Garrity Group Public Relations*

It's not enough to have a physical presence in a world where business is conducted around the planet and around the clock. The most competitive businesses operate in cyberspace as well, because that's where their customers are — shopping, researching, discussing and buying.

New Mexico residents turn increasingly to digital resources when seeking out all types of information. According to the most recent (2013) annual Garrity Perception Survey, New Mexicans use television as a news and information source 58 percent of the time, newspaper 39 percent of the time and internet news sites 29 percent of the time. Those sources are followed by radio (28 percent), internet blogs (17 percent) and social networking sites (17 percent).



When internet news sources, blogs and social media are combined, New Mexico residents turn to digital sources 63 percent of the time, surpassing television. Having an active presence in digital media gives an organization relevance.

A business's digital outreach can be as simple as a basic retail website, or it can cover multiple bases with a Facebook page, Twitter account, interactive blog and email marketing. Deciding how far to go with social media technology depends on the business type, available resources and how digital outreach fits into the company's strategic plan and vision.

Businesses with work-force limitations often find it hard to focus on outreach to the virtual world when faced with pressing real-world problems every day.

Some business owners are intimidated by social media or overwhelmed by the number of platforms and technological requirements. That's understandable, as the digital landscape is dramatically different than it was just five years ago, when people had limited ways to express their likes and dislikes, tell their stories and connect with others online.

But every social network or platform represents a business opportunity — a chance to engage existing customers and attract new ones. Each is a tool with a specific function and features that a business can leverage, but only if it's used intentionally and in sync with an overarching strategic plan.

Most businesses start slow, launching a website or Facebook page to market products and reach their target market. As the owner's comfort level grows, she might explore other corners of the digital universe, including Google + and LinkedIn.

Whatever the scope of its outreach and whatever platforms it uses, a business should speak with one voice in its digital messaging, and messages should be consistent and reflective of the company's culture and target audience's expectations.

When developing a digital outreach plan, the company's core team should decide how the voice should "sound." A law firm, for example, might want to sound serious and competent, while a children's book publisher might take a playful tone.

Content should be tailored to each digital site to make the most of what each offers. Twitter lends itself to short announcements, while networks like Pinterest and YouTube leave room for videos, photos and graphics.

While the company's message is shaped by the medium that delivers it, the material should echo the business's distinctive voice and reinforce the desired message.

A digital media program that is sporadic and irrelevant can do more damage than not having a digital presence at all. Active engagement is the first rule in this fast-paced space. Monitoring and responding to customer feedback when necessary is the second rule, as a review could help or hurt your business.

Social media platforms won't help a business if web content is outdated, the website doesn't work or the email account isn't monitored. Someone needs to develop and oversee content and keep the company's face looking fresh.

If the business can't do this work with internal resources, an external service provider can help with online strategy, website construction, training, planning, market analysis and monitoring.

For more information about social media, visit www.garritypr.com.

Finance New Mexico is a public service initiative to assist individuals and businesses with obtaining skills and funding resources for their business or idea. To learn more, go to www.FinanceNewMexico.org. Sponsored by:

