

the LERN Consultant: Higher Education

LERN MEMBERSHIP SERVICES

SOCIAL MEDIA MARKETING

Tips to grow your audience, increase engagement and get a higher ROI.



Social media has become an integral part of any marketing plan. Customers want to interact with their favorite brands and share their favorite posts, tweets and pins with their friends and followers and lifelong learning programs need to be actively engaging customers on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest.

Unfortunately, for time and cash-strapped marketers, a program's print brochure (the golden standard of lifelong learning marketing) and emails are no longer enough on their own.

Social media has become a big part of our lives, and using it as one of the tools in the overall marketing plan has become almost mandatory for a successful marketing effort. With the almost universal use of smartphones in the U.S. and the increased use of other mobile technology, one of the most



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Reach is broadened when interaction is encouraged.

On Facebook, for example, whenever a fan of a page likes or comments on a post, Facebook links to their profile page, meaning search engines like Google find more reciprocal links between that page and its fans, improving the SEO value of those links.

There are many possibilities for encouraging interaction among fans including photo caption contests, asking questions or doing polls and, most importantly, posting high-quality, shareable content to the page.

Some specific ideas for increasing engagement:

- Ask Questions
- Run Contests
- Host Live Q&A Sessions
- Conduct Polls and Surveys
- Encourage User-Generated Content (Think photos, photo captions or testimonials)
- Post Current Events
- Include Visuals
- Join Twitter Chats
- Add students, instructors and others as contributors to Pinterest boards
- Offer Incentives for Shares and Conversions
- Ask People to Engage
- Respond in a Timely Manner
- Give Credit
- Share and Curate Content
- Vary the Types of Posts
- Use Hashtags and Tags

effective ways to reach potential customers is through social media. A recent study by Deloitte found that Americans collectively check their smartphones more than 8 billion times per day. Other studies have shown that individuals check their phones from 35 to 150 times per day.

Being active on social media helps with search engine optimization (SEO) and inbound traffic – visitors that you attract naturally via their searches and others that link to your pages. Also, social media helps to deliver more conversion opportunities – every time you post, pin, and tweet or share an update, you create a conversion opportunity – and higher conversion rates at a lower cost than other forms of marketing. In fact, social media has a 100 percent higher lead-to-close rate than outbound marketing, according to the State of Inbound Marketing from HubSpot, a Cambridge, Mass.-based inbound marketing software and consulting company.

Social media also helps to build brand recognition, loyalty and authority, especially as you build your audience and engage them more.

But building an audience and increasing engagement isn't as easy as just building a page on a social media platform.

Ultimately, any social media strategy is about expanding your reach via engagement and interaction.

Expanding reach and increasing engagement can be accomplished in a number of different ways:

1. Follow post frequency best practices.

This will help improve the chances of posts being included in the feeds of current followers. Regular posting is important, but it is also important to not post too often. According to the social media, e-commerce and digital marketing data company, SumAll Analytics, two posts per day is the perfect number. Organic reach, comments, and engagement typically hit their highest point with two posts per day and tend to start dropping off after that.

2. Post a variety of valuable, sharable content.

Posts should make people want to click and share with their friends. This means also including social share links on things such as a digital version of a brochure and other content items created in-house.

3. Interact via liking, using hashtags and tagging, and sharing content and commenting on other pages.

(SUGGESTION: Utilize likes, hashtags, tagging and sharing content...)

Social media is about being social and acting like other businesses and organizations don't exist isn't a good practice. The more pages your program follows and likes, the more robust your social media feeds will become, giving you more options and ideas for sharing content and, following other pages should also generate new fans for your page.

4. Include social media information on all printed materials and include social media buttons on your website and in promotional and personal emails.

Be sure to let people know how to find your pages.

Respond – Even to Negative Comments

The goal of social media is to engage the audience in a two-way conversation. Unfortunately, all conversations will not be positive but that's OK. LERN recommends programs not ignore these comments but rather use them as an opportunity to converse with the audience and show that you are responsive and offer great customer service.

Responding quickly with a positive tone can help you increase customer loyalty and retention.

Some tips for dealing with negative comments:

- Respond quickly. Don't let comments – positive or negative – sit too long without some sort of response.
- Be sincere and personal with your response. Don't use a standard response for every complaint or negative comment. Use a conversational tone and try to include the customer's name in your response.



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Hashtags and Tagging

Using hashtags can be a great way to link certain types of posts together or reach a new audience with your posts. You can utilize hashtags on any of your social media platforms and they are becoming more important and widely used all the time.

Hashtags are used for things like:

- Events or conferences, like #LERN16
- Current events, like #supertuesday
- Holidays or celebrations, like #internationalwomensday
- General interest topics, like #Cooking or #ChocolateLovers
- Popular hashtags, like #tbt or #MotivationMonday

Using hashtags can be a great way to link certain types of posts together or reach a new audience with your posts. Hashtags are also a great way to find relevant posts to share with your audience.

Hashtags are another way to encourage engagement and generate content. Many pages promote a unique hashtag on social media and in print materials to solicit photos or other content from users. When someone uses the hashtag and you want to use their photo or other content, reply with "We'd love to use your photo in our brochure, website, etc., please reply with #programnamephoto to agree." And link to your terms of service.

When it comes to curated content, best practice is always to tag people and pages in any posts that are shared or reposted. Tagging on any social media platform uses the @ symbol and creates a hyperlink to that person or page. Tagging also alerts the other user and allows their followers to see the post as well, which could result in more fans for your page.



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- Acknowledge. If there was a mistake on your end, acknowledge it and apologize. Even if there wasn't, nothing you can say will change that customer's reality so the best thing you can do is work to make sure they have a positive experience with you now. This means letting the person know how and when you will fix the issue or provide them a solution.
- Direct conversations offline. This will help prevent others from joining in and allow you to provide personalized service. Include information on how to contact you, “We're so sorry to hear about [situation], if you are able, please give us a call at (800) 123-4567 so we can look into this for you/discuss a solution/help you personally/etc.”
- If there are concerns, consider putting together an escalation plan. According to Social Media Examiner, an escalation plan policy is a document that will help employees figure out who to contact within the program when handling complaints. The document should include a full list of employees and departments within the program along with their contact details.

LERN is now offering an in-depth social media analysis service which includes program-specific statistics, specific recommendations for increasing engagement and growing an audience, and resources for using social media as a marketing tool.

For more information on LERN's Social Media Analysis or to request to have your social media page and practices analyzed, contact us at info@lern.org or (800) 678-5376.

The cost for the analysis and custom report is \$195 for LERN members and \$395 for nonmembers.