



Published: March 27, 2011

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Social media great for business, attendees told

By Tara Bozick



Don't be left in the dust when it comes to social media, one communications expert told local businesspeople on Wednesday.

More than half a billion people are on Facebook with half of them using it every day.

"That's where the people are," said Bill Drury of Bill Drury Seminars.

Social media give businesses an opportunity to interact with consumers and to build a brand, he told 70 attendees of "A Passion to Connect!" brought to the Stratford Courtyard Conference Center by the Danville Pittsylvania County Chamber of Commerce.

Drury believes social media is as significant as the invention of the printing press for how they're changing the way people are communicating.

Even so, many business owners are scared to use it or are afraid of wasting time, he said.

Some businesses are afraid of getting negative feedback. Yet, these tools can help businesses make huge strides in customer service, he said.

People are already talking about businesses online and customer reviews and the recommendations of friends empower today's consumers.

"Businesses have to, in a sense, say this is a genuine shift in the way people communicate and I need to put my toes in the water," said Drury of Plano, Texas.

Drury advises novices to take baby steps. Pick one platform, like Facebook, and spend five minutes in the morning and five minutes in the afternoon using it, he said. Business owners don't have to juggle 20 different platforms.

But remember, using social media is not about direct selling so much as public relations and establishing a presence and brand, he said. Most importantly, it's about creating and building relationships.

"It really is how people interact these days, through their computer, through their phone," said attendee Stephanie Anderson, marketing director for Commonwealth Home Health Care in Danville.

"It gives you an opportunity to get feedback from your customer base," added attendee Shane Mitchell, information technology manager for Commonwealth Home Health Care.

Commonwealth continually educates patients and consumers on home, like how to use their equipment and take care of it, including with video, Anderson said

Now, social media enhance the ability to connect with consumers where they are more comfortable — at home, Anderson said.

"Social media is a growing vehicle for businesses to promote their products and services," said Chamber President Laurie Moran.

Tips

Tips from Bill Drury and Giovanni Gallucci on using social media:

- Take baby steps. Pick one platform, like Facebook, and spend five minutes in the morning and five minutes in the afternoon using it.

Facebook:

- Use a "keyword rich" name as close to your public figure or business name as possible.
- Maximize your picture. "This is very valuable real estate here," Drury said. You want to maximize what your customers see."
- If you have a blog, feed it to your page.
- Make the first page that comes up as "fun, creative, entertaining and interactive." Do this with a custom landing tab. For more info, visit www.tabsite.com.

Twitter:

- Start off with family or friends. Find people to tweet back and forth with.
- Follow people who you think are interesting.
- Use a photo of yourself that's interesting. For instance, Gallucci made his photo into a cartoon.
- Mix in some personal information.
- Don't spam.
- Use the Twitter Local application to know what everyone is talking about in a certain area.

YouTube:

- Titles are very important. Include keywords and phrases to help Google find it.
- Completely fill up the description box. Some websites can translate a manuscript.
- Videos with comments are higher in the search rankings. "You want people to make comments," Drury said. "You want interaction on your video."

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