

Should I Set Up a MySpace Page For My Retail Business?

It seems like everybody is talking about Social Networking Services (SNS) these days. You've probably heard of the places like MySpace and Facebook: sites that are growing by leaps and bounds in terms of their popularity. A social network service allows individuals to create online social networks of people who share interests and activities, or who are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others. Most SNSs provide a variety of ways for users of the service to interact, such as chat, messaging, email, video, voice chat, file sharing, blogging, discussion groups, and so on. What is unique about SNSs is their ability for users to connect directly with each other. In most social networking services, both users must confirm that they are friends before they have access to each other's private information. For example, if Alice lists Bob as a friend, then Bob would have to approve Alice's friend request before they are listed as friends. Additionally, SNSs usually have privacy controls that allow the user to choose who can view their profile or contact them, etc.

The value for retailers is from connecting with people, or making 'friends'. Many users spend time looking at the 'friends' of the people who they are 'friends' with, so SNSs can allow a retailer with a MySpace or a Facebook page to be seen by large networks of individuals. Of course, this is all predicated on getting an initial group of 'people to visit the site and to want to be friends with the retailer page.

Proponents of SNSs for retailers highlight several benefits, including:

- SNSs reach a young, hip demographic. If you can encourage visitors to your MySpace page to be your 'friend', you can connect with their other friends and they can be Word of Mouth (WOM) ambassadors for

your store.

- SNSs can drive traffic to online retailers: a recent report showed that MySpace drove more traffic to online retailers than MSN search.
- People can leave comments that you can respond to, sort of a soft sell approach, It's another way to begin an important dialogue that could result in WOM activity from that individual or sales of products and services.
- Images Jewelers started a Facebook page for one simple reason: because Google now crawls the pages. This means that the page has the potential to help the store's web page with search engine placement. Additionally, Images has a bog on its Facebook page, which adds to its Google ranking. In fact, if you Google the term 'custom jewelry', Image Jewelers will be the first page that comes up. Visit their page: <http://www.myspace.com/imagesjeweler>

Others warn that retailers need to avoid being sucked into the buzz surrounding social networking sites, according to a recent report from Jupiter Research. The report found that social networking sites are nice experiences, but not places where people go when considering purchase decisions. Thus, the likelihood of driving incremental sales is low. Additionally, since most users of social networking sites are not in a shopping mindset, a retail store presence on in such venues may be totally ignored. In fact, the Jupiter report specifically recommended that if retailers want to take advantage of the social aspects of the Web, they should do so at their own Internet sites. The types of information that others can provide, such as product reviews and comments on user experiences at your store, will be most valuable when it is found directly on a retailer web site

So what's the bottom line? While it might be nice to have a MySpace or a Facebook presence, it's not one of the first places you need to direct your efforts. We recommend that you add a Social Networking Site only to your mix of activities once you have your own store site up and running. (Reference book). Then, you can use the Social Networking Site to direct people to that site.

If you do add a Social Networking Site to your WOM activities, consider the following:

- Social Networking Sites are places for people, not entities. Have a

personal voice at your Social Networking site, and speak familiarly and as a person who wants to connect with others, not as a retailer. Be interesting and have reasons for people to want to 'connect' with you.

- Use it as a tool for brand awareness, don't attempt direct sales with your Social Networking Site.
- You need to give people something interesting, some social glue, to keep them returning and to build trust in your Social Networking Site so it stays top of mind when it's time for people to make purchase decisions.

If you create a presence on a SNS, let us know! We'd love to hear how it works for you. And for more small business success building ideas visit:

<http://www.GrabbingGreen.com/home/about> .

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