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## Social media takes marketing to the next level

By TERESA WARREN, Special to the Daily Transcript

Social media presents many opportunities -- and a lot of confusion -- for small business owners. Most social media marketing tools are accessible, free and very simple. However, with limited time and resources, many businesspeople are overwhelmed at the notion of embarking on a social media campaign. Yet with good planning and some creativity, social media can take your marketing to the next level -- one that brings in new customers and connections.

Three of the top social media tools available are Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Each provides different opportunities and benefits. As with any new marketing initiative, you must think about your objective and plan accordingly. Do you want to increase awareness to your company to a new base, funnel new product and service information to your existing customers or expand your contacts?

### Facebook

Facebook is an easy way to provide information and dialogue with your customers and contacts.

**Opes San Diego**, a financial advisory firm specializing in investment management and residential mortgage banking, uses Facebook to provide updates on stocks, mortgage rates and more. The company also uses Facebook's invitation feature to invite its followers to events in which Opes is participating and pass along tips such as how to keep your credit score high.

Designing a Facebook page is easy and free. Sending an e-mail announcing your new Facebook page and inviting people to join you on Facebook is an efficient way to grow your base. With a good foundation of followers, your page will grow organically. Facebook sends you weekly updates about who has visited your page, which can provide great feedback.

Facebook lets your personality to shine through and allows you to relate to your clients in a different way. As one expert says, "use Facebook to talk to your customers like you would your friends." You can use photos, videos and creative postings to get your message out.

### Twitter

The *New York Times* offers up one of the best definitions of the value of Twitter: "Small businesses typically get more than half of their customers through word of mouth, and Twitter is the digital manifestation of that. Twitter users broadcast messages of up to 140 characters in length, and the culture of the service encourages people to spread news to friends in their own network."

When Twitter first emerged, those of us that write for a living were skeptical that effective messaging could be done in 140 characters or less. However, through creative

abbreviations and linking to web posting that provide more information, Twitter has proven to be a great avenue for business communications.

**Esquire Innovations Inc.**, a provider of Microsoft Office metadata management and document production software, uses Twitter to provide tips to product users and invite followers to webinars about the company's products. The Temecula-based company also merges Twitter with its PR efforts by sending tweets with links to articles written by its professionals. Realizing the value of retweeting messages (taking someone else's tweet and resending it to your followers), the company encourages its business partners to retweet Esquire's messages and vice versa.

Like Facebook, you should let your personality shine through on Twitter. Tweets that are uninteresting and don't provide good information aren't going to work for you.

Twitter.com provides Twitter 101, a step by step guide to getting started and using Twitter effectively.

### **LinkedIn**

LinkedIn is a business-oriented social media tool for networking. Professionals establish "connections" with other professionals. LinkedIn is especially useful for target marketing. If one of your connections has a connection with one of your targets, you can request an introduction.

LinkedIn groups are communities of professionals based on common interest, experience, affiliation and goals. You can expand your contacts by joining a group or starting your own. LinkedIn also has a question and answer feature that allows you to post questions and get feedback. By writing creative questions, you can demonstrate your expertise as well as get good information.

LinkedIn users have a personal profile page that includes information about your background and expertise. Your connections can write recommendations for you that are posted to your profile. Your personal profile can also be linked to a company profile that you share with other individuals within your organization. LinkedIn users receive a weekly e-mail filled with news and updates about their connections' activities, which is a great way to keep track of what others are doing and for others to keep track of you, as long as you are keeping your profile and connections updated.

**Get going** Like any marketing program, social media initiatives take time to execute and even more time to see results. Experts suggest committing a certain amount of time each day to social media efforts. If you are overwhelmed at the thought of trying to find yet more time each day, start by utilizing one of these tools. As Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn offer different benefits, select the one that best fulfills your needs and jump in. Social media has its place in marketing, but don't forego traditional marketing methods that have been successful for you in the past. Websites, news releases, e-mail campaigns and other "old school" tools are still valid ways to market. The key is blending the old and the new. By doing so, you'll take your marketing to the next level.

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*Warren is president of TW2 Marketing, a San Diego-based marketing and public relations firm that assists professional service organizations of all sizes with their communications needs.*