



Unless you were on the space shuttle or vacationing on a deserted island recently, you can't have missed the big news this week. LinkedIn.com, the most popular professional social media platform went public. They were the hottest buzz from the technology sector on Wall Street. With more than 100 million users, LinkedIn is more than ready for prime time. Yes, 100,000,000 users, and that is a somewhat modest number when compared to other social media giants like Facebook and Twitter. Facebook now has 640,000,000 users and Twitter has 175,000,000. And, don't forget YouTube where viewers now exceed 2 billion people a day. These statistics surely have the naysayers perking up and paying attention.

Clearly, Internet social media is alive, well and here to stay. Those who said it was just a fad were so, so wrong. The three social media giants mentioned above are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to opportunities available to connect with not only potential customers, but potential employees, allied professionals, suppliers, service providers and experts in myriad fields. The potential for ROI for your time, effort and budget in social media is enormous.

What does all this mean to you as a business owner? Lots and lots of opportunities. If you have not yet developed a social media strategy and included social media marketing channels to your marketing plan, you are already behind the curve. That old adage 'Be there or be square' in today's market place is more along the lines of 'Be there or be invisible'. Print media is in a downward spiral -- magazines and newspapers are both struggling for survival. While the Internet and social media continue to spiral upward at a phenomenal pace. A rapidly increasing number of consumers around the globe regularly use the Internet for their pre-purchase research and e-commerce. Not having a strong branded web presence that includes social media marketing channels could well be your kiss of death.

Commerce now revolves around relationship building. Getting to know your customers and letting them get to know you and your staff before a sale is expected. It's no longer just about having the right product or service at the right price. Now, having a more personalized connection lets customers get to know, like and trust you. They want to feel your company has their best interests at heart. Who wants to deal with someone they don't trust or who are miserable human beings? Not me. Any sane person would prefer dealing with a company where they know your name, know about your needs and are interested in cultivating you as a long time, loyal customer.



If you have not yet embraced social media as a key part of your marketing plan, it's time to take the plunge. If you have not yet realized what an exciting gold mine this media can be for your company and it's success, today is the day to get started. Those who have not yet tested the waters are actually already behind early adopters who have been at work developing their on-line communities, so you will have some catching up to do. If you don't know enough or are just overwhelmed by the topic, do some research, hire someone savvy to the social media scene, or bring in a consultant. Explore the many SM options to see which platforms have already attracted your target markets, develop your strategy, set your budget and get started reaping the benefits.

Now that you've seen the light and committed to social media, please connect with us on **LinkedIn** and **Twitter**. Or, we'd love for you to join us on *Designing Strategies: The Blog*.

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