



5 Social Media Rules You Learned in Kindergarten

by Laura Finlayson

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I often hear people say their company is not ready to use social media. It doesn't have a large following, it's locally-based, or it's too small. My response: "That's why you need to start now." After all, social media can be a cost-effective way to increase your business's following, generate buzz about your products and services, and help your company grow.

I once heard of a pizza place in a college town that launched a Twitter handle and promoted it with signs alerting patrons to follow it for exclusive specials. What the restaurant did next was just short of genius.

Whenever the store wasn't busy, it would tweet a short-lived special—"free soda with a slice for the next hour," "buy one slice and get one free for the next hour," or "any large pizza for \$9 until 9 p.m." The result? Students swarmed the store. Almost any small business could use this strategy, and they should.

A pizza restaurant in a college town may be able to get thousands of followers on Twitter, but that might not be realistic for some small businesses. If you aren't sure where and how to start marketing via social media, remember these simple rules from kindergarten and put them to work in your social media marketing efforts:

Be kind to others.

I once saw a bumper sticker that read, "He who dies with the most toys wins." That's not the case with social media. Social media isn't about amassing a large number of followers; it's about building an engaged community of followers who may actually frequent your business. Engage with these people on a personal level. Talk with them and not at them.

Use one toy at a time.

You may be tempted to jump on Twitter, Facebook, Foursquare or even launch a blog, but do you or your staff really have time for all this? Probably not.

Figure out where your audience is and start there. It's far better to build an engaged following on one network than to have largely inactive profiles on several networks.

Use your indoor voice.

Posting Facebook messages about how great your company is and why your products are the best may seem like a great way to advertise, but social media isn't advertising and marketers need to quash any urges to use their advertising voices here. It's like shouting at your customers through a megaphone when you should be conversing over a cup of coffee.

Ask customers questions, answer *their* questions, post polls, and ask customers to post stories about your business. Tell customers about your news and specials, but make sure you talk about other things too.

Play by the rules.

Think that offering a free widget or coupon to everyone who likes your company on Facebook is a great way to build a following? It might be, but it's also against Facebook's rules and can cause the network to shut down your page. This would force you to build your following all over again.

Be sure you know the rules of the networks you use and play within them. There are great, cost-effective contest and promotion applications you can use to host giveaways on Facebook, so check them if you want to offer a giveaway. An app I like is [Wildfire](#).

Practice patience.

Successful social media programs do not happen overnight; it takes time to build an engaged following. But, the payoff is worth it in the long run. Don't be tempted by the scores of direct messages on Twitter that offer ways to increase your following by the thousands. These will not be engaged followers and many may not even be real humans.