

Using Social Media to Market Startup Businesses

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Editor's note: In this series, Next Avenue will follow Patricia Wynn as she embarks on becoming an entrepreneur with her North Carolina lifestyle assistant business. Future installments will note her progress, with advice for her and for other midlife entrepreneurs.

The means of marketing a business comes in many forms but with the number of times a day that prospective customers check their social media platforms, it is a good idea for small business owners to at least explore using social media to spread the word about their startup. Platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, and others offer business pages as an option to share content, beyond the realm of personal pages.

As with any marketing tool, there are do's and don'ts associated with social media; being unsure about which is which is why Patricia Wynn, owner of lifestyle assistant company Patricia Services LLC in Hillsborough, North Carolina, has yet to jump on the social media marketing bandwagon.

Wynn, 53, currently has an online presence for her company with a website through Vistaprint and a listing on Care.com. "I haven't taken the time yet to look deeply into setting up business pages on social media," Wynn said, "but when I get some free time, I will look at starting with the Facebook business page option. There is also an app called Nextdoor.com for local networking that I want to learn more about."

Wynn has a personal Facebook page and a LinkedIn profile, and a friend has posted links on Facebook to this series of Next Avenue articles about Wynn and her new business.

"If you Google me, my website for Patricia Services LLC comes up, and I updated the information on my LinkedIn profile when I opened my business in 2021," Wynn said.

Kimberly A. Eddleston, the Schulze Distinguished Professor of Entrepreneurship in the D'Amore-McKim

School of Business at Northeastern University in Boston, said social media is a good tool for small businesses to stay "top of mind" with customers.

"**Socialmedia** (<https://www.nextavenue.org/social-media-tips-for-midlife-entrepreneurs/>) is a great way to stay relevant," she said. "It should be used as a strategic marketing tool ... to establish a consistent image, which also helps you build legitimacy and credibility," she said.

Eddleston, a senior editor of the **Entrepreneur and Innovation Exchange** (<https://eiexchange.com/>) (EIX), which is a funder of Next Avenue, said one big mistake that entrepreneurs should not make on social media is to "mix personal and business information."

She added, "If you have a business, don't put pictures of your kids and pets on a business Facebook page, for example. It's a place to include special promotions that your startup may be running or where you can show how you are contributing to the community."

Wynn, who provides her clients with housecleaning, cooking, running errands and caregiving through her lifestyle assistant company, would want a social media account for her startup to "bring me more clients, business, and contacts with other local businesses that I could network with."

She knows that she must be cautious when deciding what to post on a business-related page. "With social media, you have to be careful with how you use it," she said. "Make sure that you aren't posting anything that could harm your business."

Post About Your Business, Not Your Politics

Eddleston agrees that a business page on social media should be a source of consistently communicating with



potential customers and offering inspiration rather than bombarding the market.

"Each industry is different, but you need to stay relevant," she said. "A small restaurant, for example, might put recipes on their page, because that relates to their business."

"It is important to not get involved in posting on sensitive topics, like politics, because you are going to alienate a portion of your customer base. Any negative stance is going to hurt you. It's always better to be supporting something," said Eddleston. "I would suggest if you enjoy debating political topics, perhaps use an anonymous personal social media account."

According to a [2021 article](https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2021/01/25/why-small-businesses-and-startups-should-invest-in-social-media-marketing) (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesbusinesscouncil/2021/01/25/why-small-businesses-and-startups-should-invest-in-social-media-marketing>) published by the Forbes Business Council, there are three main ways that social media platforms can assist startups. First, it can help small businesses generate brand awareness and spread information about the services they offer, potentially reaching millions of people quickly and efficiently. Second, it can direct traffic to a startup's website. Third, it can be used to directly market products and services and help entrepreneurs to target their prime audience.

Social media platforms, noted the Forbes article, provide small businesses with an opportunity to grow and engage with a cohesive group of present and future customers.

Focus on Local Efforts

As startups develop a social media presence, Eddleston said they must remember that they're "trying to establish themselves as a credible, consistent, trustworthy business." That includes having the colors and fonts in their social media profile be similar to what they use on their website and highlighting any programs they've been involved in that support the community.

"Nowadays people feel good [when they are supporting a business that is showing social responsibility](https://www.nextavenue.org/family-business-social-mission/) (<https://www.nextavenue.org/family-business-social-mission/>)," Eddleston added. "If your business has supported anything from a local school sports team to minorities in S.T.E.M. (science, technology, engineering and math) to women in engineering, put that on your

social media page. If your business has been featured in the press for involvement in any community outreach programs, post that on your social media page also."

As she considers the best way to develop her own small business social media page, Wynn has had the benefit of seeing one of her clients design a page.

"I do some cleaning for Katherine and Mark Bland, and Mark has a tennis club," she said. "He has shown me his Facebook business page for the club, and I've shared with him some tips on keeping the club clean according to Board of Health requirements."

For entrepreneurs like Wynn, once decisions have been made on which social media platforms they want to use and what content they want to post on their page, the next big decision is figuring out how often they should post.

The answer to that question depends on which platform is being used and what message a business wants to share with its audience. There is going to be some trial and error, but remember, startups can use the free analytics tools that are integrated into most social media platforms, which will help them to measure the engagement they are getting on posts.

Need Help Posting Regularly? There's an App for That

According to [MeetEdgar.com](https://meet Edgar.com/) (<https://meet Edgar.com/>), a social media scheduling application that costs companies about \$50 a month to use, small businesses might want to schedule daily Facebook and Instagram updates on stories or posts, while making updates on LinkedIn once or twice a week, for example.

Entrepreneurs can schedule posts live themselves, or pay a fee to have a social media management app such as [Buffer](https://buffer.com/) (<https://buffer.com/>), [Hootsuite](https://www.hootsuite.com/) (<https://www.hootsuite.com/>), [Sendible](https://www.sendible.com/) (<https://www.sendible.com/>) and [SocialPilot](https://www.socialpilot.co/) (<https://www.socialpilot.co/>), among others, simplify the process of creating and scheduling posts. These tools range in price from \$15 to \$100 or more per month for small businesses, but some have free versions and several offer free trials.

With social media, consistency is the key, noted Eddleston. "You don't want to start something and then have it go dormant," she said. "If there's no engagement, you have to wonder what you are doing. Whatever you decide to do should be strategic."

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