

How to Leverage Social Media for Boosting E-Commerce Sales



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For any help or clarification,
get connected with our experts at
info@indusnet.co.in

Indus Net Technologies Pvt. Ltd.
532, SDF Building, Sec V, Salt Lake,
Kolkata–700091, India
e: info@indusnet.co.in, www.indusnet.co.in

Preface :

Indus Net Technologies is an innovative IT Service, managed Online shopping has been growing by leaps and bounds. Online merchants are adopting innovative practices to attract the attention of online shoppers. A number of measures are taken by them to increase conversion rate. Optimizing the web design of their e-store is the first step towards increasing the conversion rate.

But is it enough to drive the sales forever? The answer is definitely no. You need to make an extra effort to engage consumers. The surge in the use of smartphones has already driven the number of mobile shoppers through the use of mobile applications and mobile versions of e-stores.

What is more interesting to note is that integrating social media with the online stores has been turning the tide for many merchants. It not only helps to increase sales on online stores but also on physical stores. Business owners have realized the power of social media and the impact it has on today's consumer.

However, just forming a brand page on a social media network and asking people to follow it is not going to help you anymore. Consumers expect you to conduct a lot more activities that keep them engaged and create a sense of belonging and a reason to like your brand. Loyal customers expect a special treatment through offers tailor-made for them. In this short and concise e-book, we evaluate 5 of the most important social networking sites with respect to e-commerce sales, with a special focus on Pinterest.

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Introduction – The Power of Social Media :

Social media has become critical for retailers to reach their customers. Retailers can use social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter to interact with existing customers and develop new ones.

It is interesting to note that 75% of social media generated e-commerce sales came from Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest in 2013. It empowers the customers to share their opinions about different products and brands with their friends. This is evident by the fact that 74% of consumers rely on social media to guide their purchase and 39% of Facebook users like brand pages to research about the product.

US consumers will spend \$327 billion dollars online in 2016. 4 in 10 social media users have purchased an item in e-store or online after sharing it on Facebook, Twitter or Pinterest. Social media traffic to e-commerce sites led to a revenue increase of 17.8% over the period of January to June 2013.

In the following pages, let us explore the power of five different social media networks.



Facebook

Facebook is not just a social interaction medium but it can do a lot for your business. It is a valuable secondary sales channel. You don't only sell here but build a long-lasting relationship with your customers. Set up a Facebook page. It gives you the ability to share images and information about new products with your loyal customers. It allows the customers to like your products and share it with their friends.

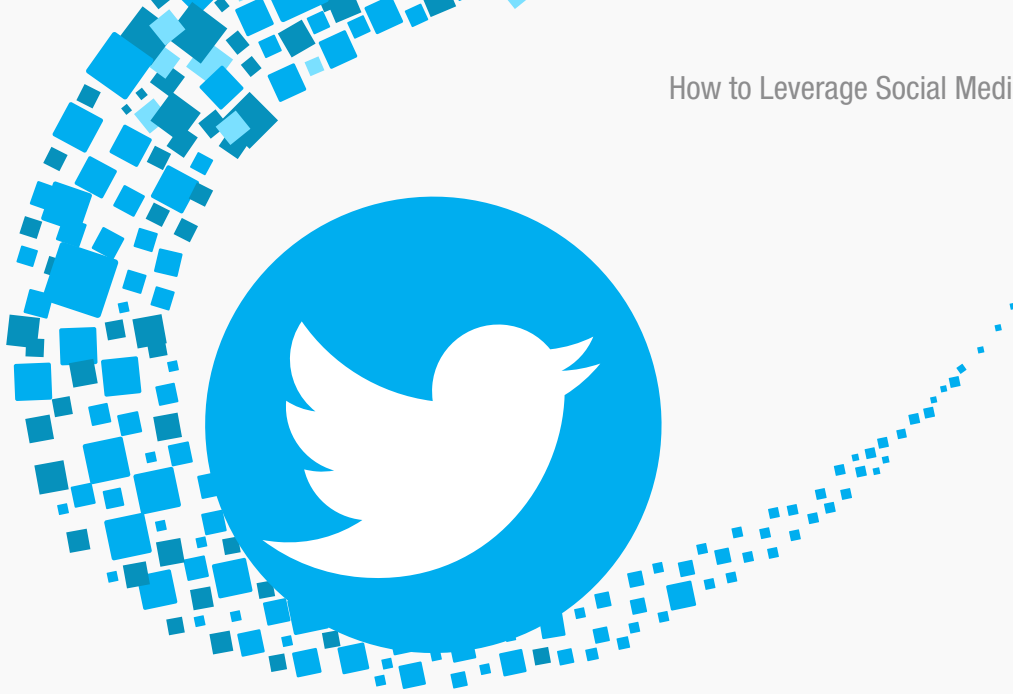
Customers often trust the product what their friends like. And you get many leads owing to your existing customers. Integrate your Facebook page with your e-store in such a way that the customers do not have to leave the fan page. They can add the products to their shopping cart and check out on a single page.

Even if you don't own an online store, you can still sell your products through Facebook. There are a number of applications specially designed for selling products through your Facebook fan page. Your products can also be displayed to the relevant customers through Facebook Advertising.

Facebook can be a very powerful tool to increase conversions. Make sure that you engage your target audience with links to specific products on your website. Encourage users to share those images, run contests and keep everything light-hearted and humorous. Do not engage in extremely sale-like behavior. That is going to drive away people from you.

“The thing that we are trying to do at Facebook, is just help people connect and communicate more efficiently.”

- Mark Zuckerberg



Twitter

Twitter is another social media platform for selling your products online. The USP of Twitter is that it offers real time news which goes viral as soon as it is posted. All the customers who are following your profile will be able to see the latest time bound offers. It is especially useful for the local customers to offer high value and trending products.

Twitter's hashtag commerce enabled by Chirpify helps you to promote tweets and send targeted tweets. The more recent version of hashtags is *actiontags* which turns Twitter into a more fluidic and cross-selling channel engaging customers and getting them to act. *Actiontags* is the rising phenomenon which is used in tandem with traditional advertising medium. *Actiontag* is associated with specific action like “#buy, #vote, #like, #subscribe, #win etc”. It even lets the user sign up on websites, visit Facebook fan page and make purchases.

“I particularly like Twitter, because it's short and can be very funny and informative. It's a little bit like having your own radio program.”

- Margaret Atwood, Author

e-commerce store owners can advertise on TV and newspaper to use a specific *actiontag* for a particular product and event respectively. On the other hand, targeted tweets allow business owners to send a tweet to a specific audience based on their geographical location and device. And the owners only have to pay when users engage with them. Engaging here refers to clicking through or retweeting. The recent collaboration of Twitter with Stripe is going to ease the payment mechanism at e-commerce stores.



Pinterest

Form a Pinterest business account and start pinning. That's true, pinning images on your board forms the basis of this amazing social media network. A lot can happen for your e-commerce business by posting the right images on Pinterest. Let us see how to make the most out of it:



Encourage customer engagements

You can ask your customers to share their opinions about the new product you have pinned. If they like it, you can ask them to repin it. If your customers are already using your product, you can ask them to share the image of that product. Include Call to Action buttons on the image, if you want them to sign up on your website.

Embed the link of your website in the image you have pinned on your board. You can also ask them to like your Facebook fan page. You can even hold a contest and ask the customers to repin the image from your board which they like the most. This will give you an idea about the most popular product. You can then select the winner who re-pinned the product that got the most attention.



Generate leads

Pin the image and embed your personalized web page that contains quality content like market surveys, case studies, ebooks and other interesting content. Once you are successful in attracting the attention of your prospects, you can pitch the images of your product or service that directs the customer to your e-store.



Sell your products

If you are looking forward to quickly sell your products on Pinterest, create a board with images of the product you want to sell. Mention their prices along with them and add call to action button like “buy” that directs the customer to the check out page of your web store. You can even offer exclusive discounts to your loyal customers by sharing coupons and QR codes which they can redeem from your store.



Invite them to events

Pin the image of the event you want to sell the tickets for. You can do so by sharing the images of the past events or what your event is going to be like. Visual content will inspire the audience to visit your event.

“I use Pinterest for everything. Book collections, trips, hobbies. It's all there. I planned my wedding on it. When I had a kid, I planned all his stuff on it. So it was nice to discover that I wasn't the only one.”

- Ben Silbermann, CEO, Pinterest



Create awareness and inspire them

Even if you are planning to establish your corporate identity by creating awareness campaigns, Pinterest is a great way to do that. You can pin the images in a chronological sequence on your board to let people know about your efforts in the past to encourage blood donation in your area and how it helped the needy.



YouTube

This video content sharing site holds the capacity to market your business by educating, entertaining and inspiring the visitors. Visitors can like the video you created and share the same with their friends through embedded social media buttons like Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter etc.

Make short, quirky and interesting videos that add value to your customers. At the end of the video, you can mention your web store address and ask them to visit your web store for exploring and shopping your products. You can even mention about visiting your blogs and asking them to subscribe your profile for more interesting videos. Customers do get inspired by quality content and are likely to come back.

“People are building communities of people who use video. They're sharing them. YouTube's traffic continues to grow very quickly.”

- Eric Schmidt

When it comes to using YouTube for e-commerce success, make sure that you post entertaining and hilarious videos based on your product. It may not even be about your product but may target the audience who will primarily buy your products. Below the video, you can place a link to your website, preferably a landing page.

Entertaining videos that go viral are very important to attract the right kind of audience to your website. Other than viral videos, you can also create product based videos that help customers to understand how to use your products and why they are different from what your competitors offer. If you cannot afford to make conventional video, get a professional to shoot animated marketing videos for yourself.



Instagram

Instagram is no more a teenager's prerogative and it is no more a place to share selfies. Instead, it is a marketing tool that is increasingly being used by some of the biggest names. The fact that it is an image-centric social media tool makes it particularly attractive to e-commerce stores. Instagram has an audience of more than 100 million active users and big companies like Starbucks, Nike, Chanel and Audi use it to market to their audiences.

“Instagram has become one of my favorite platforms because of its simplicity.”

- Amy Jo Martin

While Instagram is highly measurable, you cannot link images to your e-commerce store. You can provide just one link on your profile. This may discourage users from using Instagram for e-commerce sales. However, it can be used to sell products directly.

Post images of your products and engage with your target audience. Build anticipation over new products and hold contests for your fans. Winners' pictures can be published on your main e-commerce store site, so that traffic increases. Ask your followers questions and learn what they expect from your products. Use feedback to make changes on your actual e-commerce store website.

Instagram allows sending direct messages as well. Use this feature to contact exclusive followers who will definitely buy your products. When it comes to Instagram and e-commerce conversions, the key lies in engaging your target audience and nurturing relationships.

Final Thoughts :

Beside the above mentioned platforms, there are many other social networks like Reddit, LinkedIn, Google+, LinkedIn, Vimeo, Vine, Hacker News, Polyvore etc which you can use to the benefit of your business. Learn about niche social marketing websites to understand the quirks of your target audience.

Leveraging social media for boosting e-commerce sales depends upon your social media strategy, your creativity, intensity of engagement and the ability to not come across as a hard-nosed salesman. The moment you appear like you are trying to sell something, you will drive away users and ruin your social media campaigns. Instead, focus on engagement and building relationships.

These valuable relationships will come back to you when they need products. Use social media tools to share images and create a good reputation for quality and price. Most e-commerce stores use social media to sell products and that is not the right way to go about it. Social media should be used for building relationships and to engage with those who may turn out to be prospective customers.

By ensuring that you are not engaging in hardcore marketing and sales techniques, you can leverage social media to suit your needs. The bottom-line is to build relationships and learn how to effectively use these tools to your advantage, with subtlety being the key.

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Indus Net Technologies Pvt. Ltd.

(www.indusnet.co.in) | E : info@indusnet.co.in | Ph : +91 33 2357 6070

532, SDF Building, Sec V, Salt Lake, Kolkata-700091, India

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Kolkata (Head Quarter)

4th Floor, SDF Building,
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Chennai

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New Delhi

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Mumbai – 400013, India

London(UK)

Indus Net Technologies Pvt. Ltd.,
6 Hays Lane,
London, SE1 2QG
United Kingdom

Boise (USA)

Indus Net Technologies Inc.,
507 1/2 W Hays St,
Boise, ID 83702,
USA

Singapore

Indus Net Technologies Pte. Ltd.,
1 North Bridge Road,
#19-04/05,
High Street Centre,
Singapore(179094)



info@indusnet.co.in

www.indusnet.co.in

INDIA | UK | USA | SINGAPORE

+91 33 2357 6070