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You've seen ads in Facebook sidebars that seem to know not only what you like, but also what you *might* like. Your Twitter feed has hosted its fair share of promoted tweets that piggyback on a recent query or trending topic. LinkedIn prods you with recommendations that are surprisingly relevant to your business interests. In other words, you may see personally the potential for social advertising. But will it work for your business?

Given the massive pools of prospects on any social network at any given time, it's a question that deserves a thoughtful answer. The curtain has closed on sending the intern to set up a Facebook or LinkedIn page. That was social media, Act One. Act Two requires more than "just showing up." Act Two is when social media evolves into social business, and social advertising - strategic, business-driving social advertising - is a core element of social business.

Social advertising can be a powerful technique for driving revenue performance, but developing a successful social advertising campaign hinges on the marketer's knowledge of not only fundamentals in advertising, but also social media essentials. While there's certainly no "silver bullet" solution for social advertising, there are some core principles that increase campaign effectiveness for most companies. Here are eight:

1. Find Your Audience

Assuming you know which social networks your prospects prefer is a reliable way to mis-allocate your advertising budget. As part of a social media marketing plan, you need to spend time researching which networks your potential buyers frequent for community interaction and information. This step will save you money and improve performance later.

2. Think: "Focus"

You don't necessarily need to spend hundreds of thousands, or even tens of thousands of dollars on a social advertising campaign. In fact, in some cases, a few hundred dollars might be all that's needed. Social advertisements more about targeting and efficiency than mass awareness. Think about the exact people you want to reach with your message: who they are,

where they live, what they do for work and fun, their companies of interest, hobbies, etc. Fine tune your campaign to target them and only them. One word of caution for small businesses: some ongoing social advertising campaigns are charged to credit cards and it can be easy to forget that you're incurring regular expenses.

3. Keep It Short

If you thought mastering the 140 character tweet was easy, you're in luck. Folks have a short attention span, and you'll need to use those 140 character "elevator pitch" skills you've been honing to catch their interest as quickly as possible, then use your content savvy to induce engagement. A clear call to action, hyper-personalization and a dash of intrigue or humor is an ideal formula.

4. Maximize Keywords

One way to avoid wasting your money is to become a keyword surgeon. Google's free [Keyword Tool](#) is a great starting point, but there are many options out there for brands looking to see what words bring them the most traffic, what words their competitors use, and what people search for related to their industry.

5. Tell Viewers What To Do

People are more likely to engage with your brand if you tell them what to do, then make it easy for them to do it. Whether you want them to click a button, complete a form, or retweet a post, making your request unambiguous will dramatically increase the frequency of a desired action. Remember, social advertising is all about engagement. Make interaction simple.

6. Drive Customers "Home" (to your Website / microsite / landing page)

In many cases the data provided on social platforms will be less "rich" than what you can collect on your own web properties. Your best bet for tracking metrics (and triggering conversions) is to route prospects to a microsite or a custom landing page designed specifically for the campaign. Also try to minimize the number of clicks required to complete the call to action and reduce the number of form fields to essentials-only. You can use progressive profiling to capture more data later.

7. Don't Spread Yourself Too Thin

Pick a couple of social advertising sites at a time. Trying to blast the entire Internet with your social advertisements is not only a waste of money, it's also harder to track and fine tune. Less

frequent, higher quality ad engagement in a more targeted and audience-appropriate manner is a preferable model on the social Web. Relevance is key.

8. Engage and Entertain

Although "captive audience" marketing is long over, for many advertisers the urge to broadcast is like a phantom limb. Social customers choose which brands they listen to -- and attributes like human, entertaining and informative tend to be the qualities people find most connection-worthy. The seeds of loyalty are sewn well in advance of purchase.

While it may seem like there are new social sites popping up daily, it helps to focus on the most popular networks first, making sure you have metrics in place to know if your ad is effective.

Twitter : Twitter has been adding advertising features at a rapid pace in a bid to prove its revenue can scale with its audience. There are several types of Twitter ads including sponsored tweets, promoted trends and promoted accounts. Since Twitter's advertising product is in a closed beta, and because the company has not released pricing, there are no reliable ROI studies. If your brand has a strong Twitter following, Twitter ads may be enticing but the ROI is not quite there yet.

Facebook: Facebook Ads offer some serious firepower for a variety of brands -- often for a fairly low entry fee. Toss in some of the more advanced options they offer at higher price points, and even Fortune 500 companies enjoy measurable impact on Facebook. Ultimately that's the rare and unique power of Facebook Ads: It scales to meet the needs of everyone from boutique retailers to multinational business-to-business enterprises. Facebook offers self-service display ads to its user base. These ads layer in the target's social graph data, and are served according to the preferences and settings of all Facebook users in the advertiser's chosen demographic. Facebook Display Ads offer metrics and statistics for tracking an ad's performance, and an ongoing billing plan which a social advertiser can start, stop or modify at any time. As a general rule, the more narrow an audience a company wishes to target, the higher a CPM the advertiser should expect to pay. The overall cost of a Facebook Display Ad is minimal and ROI for these ads really depends on the industry and company's objectives.

LinkedIn: LinkedIn is often overlooked as a channel for ad placement but it offers a very targeted network of like-minded, business-focused people looking for products, services and connections. LinkedIn offers a variety of paid ad and marketing options, but their options can be difficult to track. For a large company that wants to white label more of its LinkedIn presence,

the advanced, higher cost options might be most beneficial. For smaller companies, LinkedIn Display Ads will be the better value. Display Ads are by far LinkedIn's best known option and businesses may be comfortable spending money on LinkedIn because they know that on LinkedIn, business interests come first.

Getting Started with Social Advertising? Keep This in Mind

A socially connected audience is just as likely -- potentially even more likely -- to post about a negative experience as a positive one. To avoid critical comments about your ads, it's important to know which online communities your prospects frequent and understand the social mores of the networks on which you plan to advertise. Each site has its own unique language, culture and set of social norms. Understand what that community values before running an ad on the platform.

Also, keep in mind that your audience uses these social sites primarily to interact with family, friends and colleagues. Users will perceive too much advertising as invasive or inconsistent with their desired experience.

Social advertising is challenging brands to think differently about both social engagement and advertising and it requires marketers to appeal to a prospect in new ways. Finally, by using social influence and other social dynamics for social advertising campaigns, brands can increase the value and effectiveness of their marketing spend while simultaneously reducing the cost.

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