

Which social channels are right for your brand?

 By [Daniel Schmidt](#), issued by [Mark1](#)

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With 2015 looming, consumers are sharper, harder to impress and less easily influenced than ever before. It's the digital age and 'the man on the street' is looking into a screen. If you run a business and you aren't embracing the public on social media, your audience is sure to be entertained by brands more slick and streetwise than your own.

How can one be sure which social networks to choose for their business? Many brands will have asked themselves that question, but there isn't a forthright solution. As rich as SA's marketing and media talent pool is, nobody has all the answers for branding on social media. The landscape continues to evolve and as marketers adapt, new best practices emerge. A quick look in the app store indicates that new platforms are built regularly, but very few actually challenge the big names. That said, the next big thing could be around the corner - there are no safe predictions when it comes to the future of tech.

When choosing which networks are right for your brand, you should consider your offerings and how you'd like to position your business. Creating brand recognition - and hopefully loyalty - is a priority for all businesses, and this is something that can be done on all social media. But you should also apply yourself to some of the following arguments:

- Would an analysis of consumers on the market suit your business type?
- Do you want to determine existing customer satisfaction / sentiment?
- How important is networking with industry peers?
- What about networking at events and seminars, and discovering people with similar interests?
- Would you use social media to find new employees?
- Would new networks assist in brand activation, or the introduction of new products (creating a buzz)?
- Would running promotions and competitions on social platforms help your business?

There are also a few practical reasons to position your business in this space. It's wise to clinch a few key accounts (e.g. Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn) before somebody else does. Given that the future may demand them as part of your strategy, pin them down and take ownership. Another logical reason is search engine optimisation. Search grows all the time, as more people connect to the web globally, and being active on social media will allow your brand more visibility on the search engines. Moreover, [optimising your social accounts](#) enables your business to stay above competitors with similar brand names.



(Image: Shutterstock)

Doing fun and creative things in the social space is an incredible way to build a following and generate visits to your website, but building a brand is more about trust and loyalty. Social pages are a place for complements, a place for complaints and a place for prospective buyers to judge a brand's values. These platforms revolutionised owned media, and a power shift in the last 5 years has played into the hands of the consumer.

The 'one size fits all' model doesn't apply to social media. Some companies get it right, others get it horribly wrong. But the best managers are good strategists and they have done their homework on the following:

- They know their brand - they've also spent time learning from the success and failures of others.
- They know their community - when they have something to say, they know their audience and the way in which they prefer to receive information. They also know that different social networks involve different consumer behaviour.
- They are good at listening - this is crucial to customer care. If many people are saying the same things, these need to be investigated.
- They know that organic and paid strategies produce different responses and they know which products and services to push into each method.

See below some information on the big names in social. This can help you decide which medium is right for you:

Facebook

It's important to position your brand on Facebook. It has a mammoth audience, highly segmented targeting and endless opportunities to engage users who spend long periods online, in multiple daily sessions. That said, people are there to connect with friends - instead of pushing products at them, let them come to you by opting for strong organic strategies and highly targeted but non-intrusive ads. A bit of attention to detail with your copy and targeting could see your Facebook campaign delivering better results than conventional display ads.

According to The Next Web, [Facebook surpassed 1.2 billion monthly active users](#), with 945 million of them using Facebook mobile, and over 750 million of them logging in daily.

Twitter

Twitter is arguably more fun than Facebook when you learn to use it properly, and the crowd it attracts is young and savvy. 'Hashtags' help collate information and regulate the clutter created by 500 million daily tweets, while 'Trends' allow users to discover what is happening in their neck of the woods. Together, these components allow easy navigation around Twitter, and the platform is said to be how most Americans hear about news nowadays. Like Facebook, Twitter is recommended for most businesses and the site has upped its advertising game with improvements in the interface and conversion tracking. When making use of promoted tweets and trends, be creative with your message and users will not be opposed to interacting with your brand.

Twitter says there are [over 280 million active users](#), with around 80 million users accessing the network via mobile.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is still the ideal place for building brand credibility. People do a lot of research before they trust a brand and setting up shop on LinkedIn helps businesses be perceived as trustworthy and distinguished. While advertising on other platforms are great for B2C retail, LinkedIn serves as a high end marketing network for services such as Legal Practitioners, Architectural Firms, and the like. The community is one of the largest, the majority being extremely well educated professionals with buying power.

According to Business Insider, [LinkedIn reached 300 million users](#) in 2014 and 48% of them were spending more than two hours a week on LinkedIn in the last year.

Google+

Google doesn't use its social medium for advertising (businesses can utilise the company's Search and Display networks to run ads). The model is becoming more popular with users and joining up is pretty simple once you have a Gmail account. It combines all the features you'd like to see in a social network: communities, trends and hashtags for easy navigation and the collation of information. Google+ is one of the fastest growing platforms and it's a welcome extra for most brands. That said, it seems to be a favourite for those in the marketing, media and PR spaces, who can benefit from the communities that share content highly relevant to their sectors.

According to Marketing Land, [Google+ has 300 million monthly active 'in-stream' users](#). This refers to people with Google accounts who interact with Google+ content streams in some way or another.

YouTube

A property of Google, the world's largest video sharing platform is also the second most popular search engine. Branding on YouTube is a must because 'seeing is believing' and people want to live some of the action your business offers before they're convinced. Any company that offers 'action-related' services should be showcasing on YouTube, meaning it's a must for brands in the sporting and adventure fields. Some commentators question whether YouTube really is a social network, but with subscribers, comments and sharing, it definitely functions as one and is perfect for showcasing services in a fun environment with a potentially colossal audience.

YouTube states that there are [more than 1 billion unique users on YouTube](#) every month.

Instagram

Owned by Facebook, it has a unique connection to the giant social network's 1.2 billion users. It's the perfect platform on which to host your photography business or clothing brand, where pictures can help you persuade. Most people on Instagram are under the age of 35, which creates the perfect entry for B2C and entertainment brands that are reaching out to the 18-30-year-old market.

According to CNET, [Instagram had surpassed the 200 million user mark](#) by March 2014.

Pinterest

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then it's worth being on Pinterest. The world's fastest growing social network in the last few years, with expectations high that it isn't done yet. It's an interesting platform with a notable cultural shift. Unlike conventional marketing practices, businesses can generate brand awareness by 'repinning' items that don't necessarily belong to their product range, they just have to fit in with a vision or philosophy that their brand goes by. Stylists, artists, florists and chefs can convey messages to their followers in this way and can push their own products at the same time.

According to Mashable, at the end of 2013, [Pinterest was driving more traffic to publishers](#) than Twitter, LinkedIn, Reddit combined.

Tumblr

Recently acquired by Yahoo, Tumblr is a great place to set up if you want to convey a visual message to a younger audience. You might think of it as a blogging platform and not a social network, but then the same argument could be made for other micro-blogging platforms. What makes Tumblr different is the community feel, with networks of users connected by their shared interests. This enables easily shared content in the form of posts, pictures and short videos (also with hashtags) with users in similar circles.

A source revealed to Business Insider that [Tumblr has between 30 - 50 million active users](#), but there are many more unique visitors to the site. These people may not have an account, but the fact that they are there to browse makes it an ideal platform for brand building.

In conclusion, your brand should at least be on some of the big names in social media. It's a crucial area where you can develop your following extremely efficiently. If you're a dentist, a LinkedIn account doesn't make you a better professional, but it can only add value. If you work in construction and you never use a computer, that doesn't mean people aren't interested in what you have to show the world, and that's what social media is about: telling your story.

Scott Bedbury once said that a great brand is a story that's never completely told. Your brand's story is the tangible part of your business that people are going to connect with, make sure you tell it perfectly.

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