

SMALL BIZ SURVIVAL

THE RURAL AND SMALL TOWN BUSINESS RESOURCE



Finding Time for Social Media

Social media can suck up every minute of available time, if we let it, and we all had plenty to do before social media came along. Here are some hard-won tips on saving time.

Set Goals First

If you have no goals, you never know when you are finished for today. Start with a list of the services and social networks you plan to use and how you plan to use them. For example:

- **Sample Goal: maintain a strong local network.**
 - Daily actions: reply/comment on 7 people's Facebook or Twitter status updates.
 - Weekly actions: go through new followers or connection invitations on Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. Comment on a local blog, Facebook Page or forum where your residents gather to comment.

Use Checklists and a Schedule to Keep on Track

Put your action steps on an index card, like a checklist. **Set a scheduled time daily for your social media activity**, such as the first thing in the morning, or for 30 minutes after your lunch. Use that time to follow your checklist. You save time two ways: you aren't getting distracted by social activity all day, and you are much more focused in your time.

Create Lists to Follow Your Priorities

Create lists on your social sites that put *your* priority people first. On Twitter, create Lists. On Google+, create Circles. In Facebook, create Interest Lists. During your social media time, start reading updates from your lists, in order of importance. On LinkedIn you can't make lists, but can change which *types* of updates you see. Instead of viewing "All Updates," you might check profile changes first to see if anyone has a new job, then look at who has made new connections, then skim the shared articles last.

Use News Summary Tools

[Paper.li](http://paper.li) makes an online daily newspaper out of links shared on Twitter. Create your own on any topic, Twitter list, a hashtag, or from all the people you follow on Twitter. **(Tip: create a list of locals, and make a Paper.li from that. You'll get daily tips from your neighbors.)** Or, read my Paper.li of links and photos shared by rural and economic development experts here: <http://buff.ly/1b2pH9z> No Twitter or Paper.li account needed. It's a great place to get inspiration and ideas for your own updates.

Don't Automate the Wrong Way

Because social networks are all about social, **messages that are obviously automated or cross-posted tend to fall flat. Each network has its own flavor.** Long updates that work well on Facebook don't fit on Twitter. Hashtags from Twitter look silly on LinkedIn. Putting the same exact text on every outpost misses the chance to customize for your different audiences. Don't try to "copy and paste" your way through this; be smart about it.

Multiplying Efforts Does Work

To multiply your efforts, **know which pieces of the puzzle go where.**

Example: Newsletters. You write an email newsletter to your customers. From it, you pull the most discuss-able sections and post them on your Facebook Page to start conversation. Then you pull out the most interesting or attention-getting quotes to update your Twitter status. To update your LinkedIn status, you select an interesting and business-like bit. Finally, you add more photos to the text to make a blog post. **To remember what pieces go where, you might want to put this process into a checklist.**

Another Example: Presentations. If you're part of any local organization, you probably have **beautiful slide shows** of your projects or your town. But they only get used occasionally. To multiply that effort, use a tool like [Slideshare](#). Upload the slide show at Slideshare, then share your presentations on your LinkedIn Profile. Use the embed code from Slideshare to include specific presentations in a post on your blog or on a page on your website. Slidshare also integrates with Facebook for more sharing.

Multiply Your Efforts from One Tool: Tools like [HootSuite](#) and [MarketMeSuite](#) allow you to monitor searches, send replies and schedule updates to Twitter, Facebook Pages, LinkedIn, Google+ Pages, and Instagram from one dashboard. During your scheduled social time, you will find many links to share. [Buffer](#) will spread them out throughout the day to Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, or Google+. Just remember when bad news breaks, you need to stop your scheduled tweets so you don't look callous.

Use Smart Automation Carefully: [If This Then That](#) ("IFTTT") will automate all kinds of sharing activity. It works with Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram and many more services. For example, when you publish a blog post, IFTTT can automatically share the photos to Flickr and post the link to LinkedIn. Use it to set up some smart automation, but be selective, following the rules above.

Use Your Calendar

Your local events can benefit from online promotion spread over several weeks. Create an editorial calendar of events and projects you'll want to promote online, at least three to six months ahead. Your editorial calendar includes your email newsletter, blog posts, and social network updates. You'll save time searching for something to talk about and stay focused on your goals.

Success Secret: Give social media short bursts of focused attention, based on your goals and plans.

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