

How to Use Social Media to Engage Small Business Decision Makers

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Companies that market to small businesses should actively take advantage of business-to-business social media resources before taking on more IT resource-intensive projects. Some business-to-business social media resources requiring little IT investment include Webinars, podcasts, and company and brand pages on social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook. Here, Knowledge Center contributor Rob Feinstein explains how to use social media to most effectively market to small business decision makers.

How to Use Social Media to Engage Small Business Decision Makers



Companies marketing to [small businesses](#) would be well-advised to first focus on social media tactics that require little IT investment, according to [Engaging Small Business Decision Makers through Social Media](#), a recent study involving 1,711 small business leaders. Using Webinars and podcasts are just two of the social media tactics suggested by the study. Companies marketing to small businesses should also establish a presence on top social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook before pursuing more IT resource-intensive initiatives (such as creating a company-managed online community).

The study found that four of the top five most effective social media tactics for engaging [small business](#) decision makers do not require significant IT investment or involvement. Company blogs are the exception. Company blogs should be backed by both a strategic content strategy and the resources necessary to create this content on an ongoing basis. This should be done before IT resources are allocated to blog creation or management.

The study examined the social networks and other social media [resources](#) that small business owners and managers turn to for business-relevant information. In contrast to the common perception of social media as inherently "social" or interactive, study participants using social media for business were much more likely to use resources which don't require interaction such as Webinars and podcasts (67 percent) or reading product reviews (63 percent) than they were to participate in online discussions (29 percent).

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Top five social media resources

The top five social media resources used by [small business](#) leaders are:

1. *Webinars and podcasts*

Small business leaders consider Webinars and podcasts two great [resources](#) for professional development, industry research, and learning about potentially relevant products and services. Webinars and podcasts save small business leaders the time and expense of attending in-person training.

2. *Ratings and reviews*

Ratings and reviews provide useful input into the business buying process, particularly those ratings or reviews provided by other [small businesses](#) using the product or service.

3. *Company and brand pages on social networking sites*

Social network participation is now mainstream for adults in the United States, with 46 percent using sites such as [Facebook](#) and 25 percent participating on a weekly basis. Small business leaders are increasingly turning to these sites to find the latest information about important vendors, products and services.

4. *Company blogs*

Small business leaders praise company blogs—at least those that are "well-written, current and with good thought leadership articles" as great sources of information about business-relevant products and services, as well as the underlying character of a company.

5. *Social media search*

While some of the business-relevant information on social media sites can be found through general Internet search engines, a great deal cannot. Realizing this, over half of small business leaders use social media search to find business-relevant information directly on sites such as [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [SlideShare](#) and many more.

[Next: Focus on External Social Media Opportunities >>](#)

B2B social media marketing initiatives require marketing and IT to work closely together to prioritize projects, allocate resources, manage execution, and maintain new systems and features. One key implication from this study for companies marketing to [small businesses](#) is that marketing can and should actively pursue B2B social media initiatives which require little IT investment *before* taking on more IT resource-intensive projects.

For example, rather than placing a company-managed online community as the core of the emerging social media strategy—a community where, according to the study, it would be very challenging to build participation by [small business](#) leaders—instead establish a company presence on one or more social networking sites. Focus your initial community development efforts on those sites.

By focusing first on external, "IT-lite" social media opportunities, companies marketing to small businesses are more likely to reach a far larger portion of their target audience in the short run, begin to develop a following, and learn key lessons that inform what social media features and functionality are actually necessary on the company Website.

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