

'Pinning down' more business with Pinterest

By Melissa McGuire

Establishing a company's presence on the Internet can be intimidating to the small business owner. Staying up-to-date with social media is challenging enough without the added stresses of new platforms and the constant changes on existing sites. But in this smartphone, web browsing, online shopping world in which we live, keeping up with social media is not an option anymore; it is a necessity for all, including the small retailer. And with the multitude of marketing tools social media provides—and for FREE—it's criminal to not take advantage.

Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter and have their rungs on the online marketing ladder. Now, the time has come for businesses to take a look at one of SoMe's (Social Media) most popular platforms, Pinterest, and realize how this social network just might be the most relevant out there for your business.

Unlike other sites where marketing content might appear live for minutes, hours or days, Pinterest content is visible forever. This is because Pinterest organizes posts by topic rather than freshness. And as everyone knows, a picture is worth a thousand words. But grabbing your audience with amazing aesthetics is only the beginning.

Veronika Harbick, a New York City-based social marketing and consumer expert who helps startups and small businesses develop effective social media strategies, increase website conversions and create brand advocates, explained that "Pinterest, at its core, is a digital scrapbooking tool, but it's really much more. It's an inspiration engine, an online shopping aid. And for businesses, it's a very effective branding and sales tool."

Realizing that you could be using Pinterest to engage with your online audience is very different from knowing how to best take advantage of it. Furthermore, knowledge of the site can be amplified by understanding the best way to involve your viewers. But don't worry; it's easy to sort everything out, build a Pinterest business plan and start pinning.

What exactly does Pinterest do? First, let's understand what the platform is all about. Pinterest is

like a bulletin board, but bigger and much more organized. It includes content and photos that show off what you like, things you sell and where you go. Pinterest's goal is to tack images (and videos) from websites you like and put them onto your boards. But instead of tacking, Pinterest calls it "pinning." You "pin" your interest—hence the name "Pinterest."

"The boards are arranged by themes of your choice and the only limit is your imagination.

You can pin images in a number of ways, includ-

Introduce yourself

Your small business will have a stronger brand if it's built on the actual people running the social media outlets. Forbes suggests introducing yourself and your employees. Every week, pin a photo of an employee's face attached to a profile or fun interview. Collecting the employees' bios all on one board will create a truly personal, vibrant company profile. It's the Pinterest version of an "About Us" page.

Pin videos

Because Pinterest is such a

promote a contest. "Pin it to Win it" promotions have been conducted by Macy's, Campbell's Soup, Shaw Industries, Flooring America and Mohawk Industries, to name a few. Have your customers pin their own images to your boards in order to win a prize. It's a great way to gather user-generated content while building buzz and engaging your audience.

Harbick advises her clients to jump into Pinterest with both feet. "Get your hands dirty! The best way to learn about

as a call to action, a reminder to the consumer to save this photo and link for later or share it with friends."

Businesses need to take advantage of both components of Pinterest—the Pinterest.com experience and the "Pin it" button, she explains. "First, retailers should build a Pinterest page with at least four different boards and a minimum of five photos on each board. Think of your most popular business categories and create fun board titles around those. Then, consider how you can authentically participate in the most popular Pinterest categories such as Food & Drink, Home Decor, DIY, Design etc. For example, Flooring America has a board called 'Carpet Friendly Recipes!'"

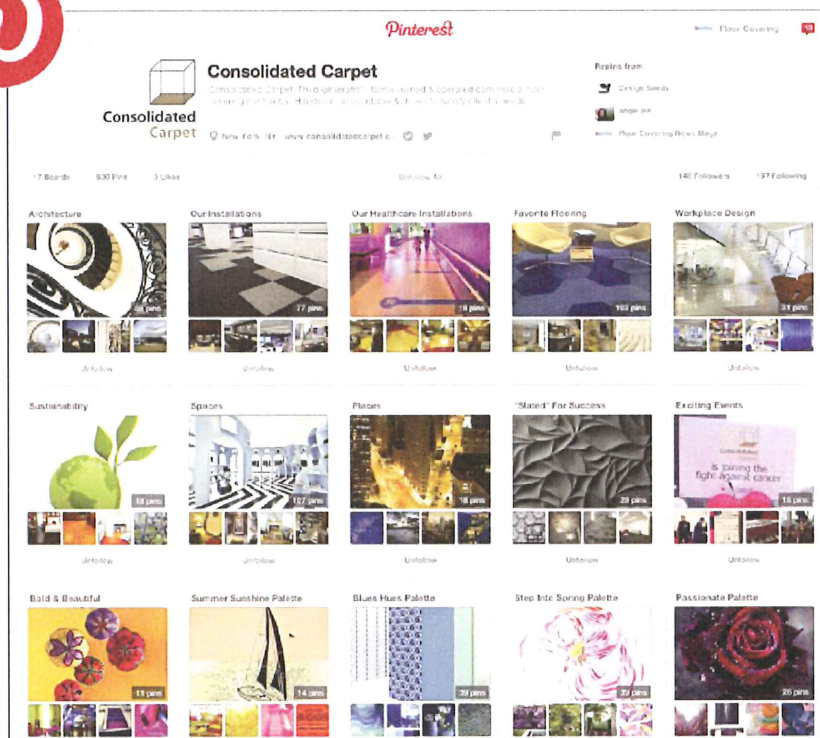
Flooring industry pinners

Those in the industry have quickly jumped online and are pinning with full force. Flooring America recently wrapped up its Save It, Pin It, Win It! competition, which gave consumers the chance to win \$5,000 in Tigressá Cherish Carpet. To enter, participants had to follow Flooring America on Pinterest and build a "Dream Room" board featuring Tigressá Carpet. Consumers could then repin the carpet choice from Flooring America's Tigressá Pinboard and choose coordinating furniture, décor, paint and more.

"Engaging with consumers in a fun and creative way allows us to better understand what inspires them from a design perspective," said Frank Chiera, vice president of marketing and advertising for Flooring America.

Consolidated Carpet uses Pinterest as a means to round out its digital strategy with a visual platform. "Because many of our target partners are in the design and architecture community, we like to remain visible and active on platforms that appeal to their professions," explained Kristine Scotto, marketing and public relations, Consolidated Carpet. "We curate our own boards to share what we like in the flooring and related industries while using the pins and boards of our partners to see what is important to them and what trends they are following. In addition, we enjoy sharing photos of our own installations and projects.

"By pinning installation photos from our own website, we've seen an increase of web traffic to our site by over 42%," Scotto



ing using Pinterest's browser "pin it" button or its iPhone app. To put this information into perspective, here is a guide compiled from experts, including Forbes.com, on helping the small business establish or amp up its Pinterest presence:

Think visually

According to Forbes.com, posts with striking images have an average of three times as many user engagements as those with no images. This applies to all forms of social media platforms but is especially true for Pinterest, where the more captivating your pin, the more likely it is to be repinned (engaged). Repinning is as simple as clicking a button and adding additional commentary, if desired. No matter what your content, you need find a striking image to accompany it.

strong visual environment, videos produced in-house or from relevant industry sources can exponentially promote your brand. Video content may directly communicate something from your business or include topics you think would interest your customers. Remember: social media for small business is almost entirely about becoming a hub of information that's stimulating for your clients and customers; it is not just about selling your products. Forbes explains online users want to see brands that relate to their needs and wants instead of sole business agendas.

Promote contests

Translating any deals, sales or special offers into smart-looking graphic coupons is a powerful way to boost circulation. Pinterest can be a great place to

Pinterest is to sign up for a personal account and start playing around," she said. "First, understand how to use it and what you, as a consumer, enjoy about it. Then you can set up your company page and employ similar strategies for your brand." Once you've pinned photos to your boards, she suggests using the free or paid analytic tools to understand what's most effective for your business and then optimize your efforts. "Just make sure to 'verify your website' with Pinterest to take advantage of these free tools." (See business.pinterest.com/analytics/)

Harbick stresses not to forget about the "Pin it" button. By adding this simple plug-in to your website, it provides an easy way for consumers to add an image from your site to their Pinterest boards. "It also serves