

SOCIAL MEDIA: *Writing for Your Audience*

There are many social media outlets and it can be overwhelming to keep track of them all. There are programs you can use to consolidate the traffic on all your outlets, and you can use them to write one message that will be posted to all your different accounts. But is this really an efficient and effective method of reaching your audience?

Different sites attract different audiences, and the message really needs to be tailored for each platform. Rather than just writing one blanket message, it's a better idea to think about what kind of audience you are writing for.

BY WELMOED SISSON, ASHI Associate

TWITTER

Think of Twitter as today's version of a chat room. Your conversation with another user can get lost amid the traffic. Twitter's daily message volume was 90 million in September 2010, and 230 million per day in September 2011. People using Twitter are seeking quick responses. Many also are using it to connect with companies regarding customer service issues.

Your Twitter audience can include people who follow you, as well as people who search for terms that might appear in your messages. You really have no control over who reads your messages, so be mindful of what you post. Careers have been ruined based on Twitter posts.

Do:

- Post a link to a news story relevant to your company.
- Search for messages containing key phrases or hashtags and reply to them, if appropriate.
- Post a picture of something interesting or unusual (via *Instagram, Twitpic* or other programs).
- Retweet interesting messages.

Don't:

- Just post a link, without any context
- Post messages close to the length limit. Makes it hard to retweet.
- Rely on autoposting (*from things like Foursquare*)

FACE BOOK

You have two Facebook audiences: your friends and your fans. Individuals have profiles (with friends); companies have pages (with fans, or "likes").

Becoming a Facebook friend is a mutual agreement (although people can subscribe to your public posts without asking permission). People can choose to become fans of your business page without any action on your part.

Many people choose to completely separate their personal profiles and their company pages. Others meld the two. Your "friend" list usually consists of people who know you, so you probably will be more comfortable sharing personal information with them. Your company page should reflect a more professional tone since most likely you won't know all your "fans."

People choose to "like" pages for various reasons. Sometimes, it is to get discounts or advance sale notices. Others want to feel as if they are part of a "club." For some, it's association with a brand (Ferrari sells 8,000 cars per year, but has 8,590,000 Facebook fans).

Facebook can be a difficult marketing platform. The first challenge is to get people to "like" your page. Since most of a home inspector's business comes from one-time clients, it can be hard to come up with a compelling reason for them to take action. You can invite people to like your page, but doing so too frequently comes off as begging.

Do:

- Use your page to post links and news about your company, your industry and related industries.
- Keep it professional; think about the image you want to project.
- Monitor your privacy settings on a regular basis to make sure you are protecting your online image.

Don't:

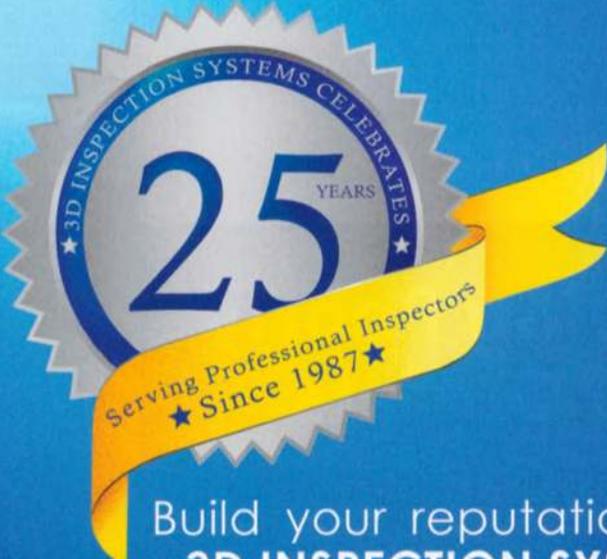
- Post the exact same message as on Twitter; Facebook doesn't use #hashtags.
- Post links to questionable stories; fact-check first!

So, what's the difference?

There are two main differences between Twitter and Facebook. First, Twitter is more immediate and fast-paced; you have just a few minutes to grab your audience's attention before newer tweets push it off the first page. But because the Twitter "timeline" is searchable, your tweets can still show up if someone searches for a word that appears in it. Using hashtags (such as #IW2012) can give tweets extra life, especially if the word or hashtag is "trending" (that is, lots of people are using it). Twitter constantly monitors what words are showing up frequently; at this writing, one of the top trending phrases was "Justin Bieber Day."

Second, you have a much greater potential audience reach via Twitter since you can search for key phrases and respond to messages containing them, even if that person is not following you. For example, if you search for "home inspector" on Twitter, you will see recent tweets containing that phrase and can reply to those messages. On Facebook, you really can't reach an audience with your message until they have actively chosen to receive your messages. U

U *Welmond Sission, Inspections by Bob, Boyds, Md., has worn many hats — from graphic artist to computer tech to custom seamstress and now home inspector. She joined her husband's company, Inspections by Bob, in January 2010 as receptionist and scheduler, and also as marketing director. Within two years, the company's presence on social media expanded greatly, and their business volume increased dramatically. The Maryland-licensed home inspector focuses on using her training to create better marketing materials for the company.*



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